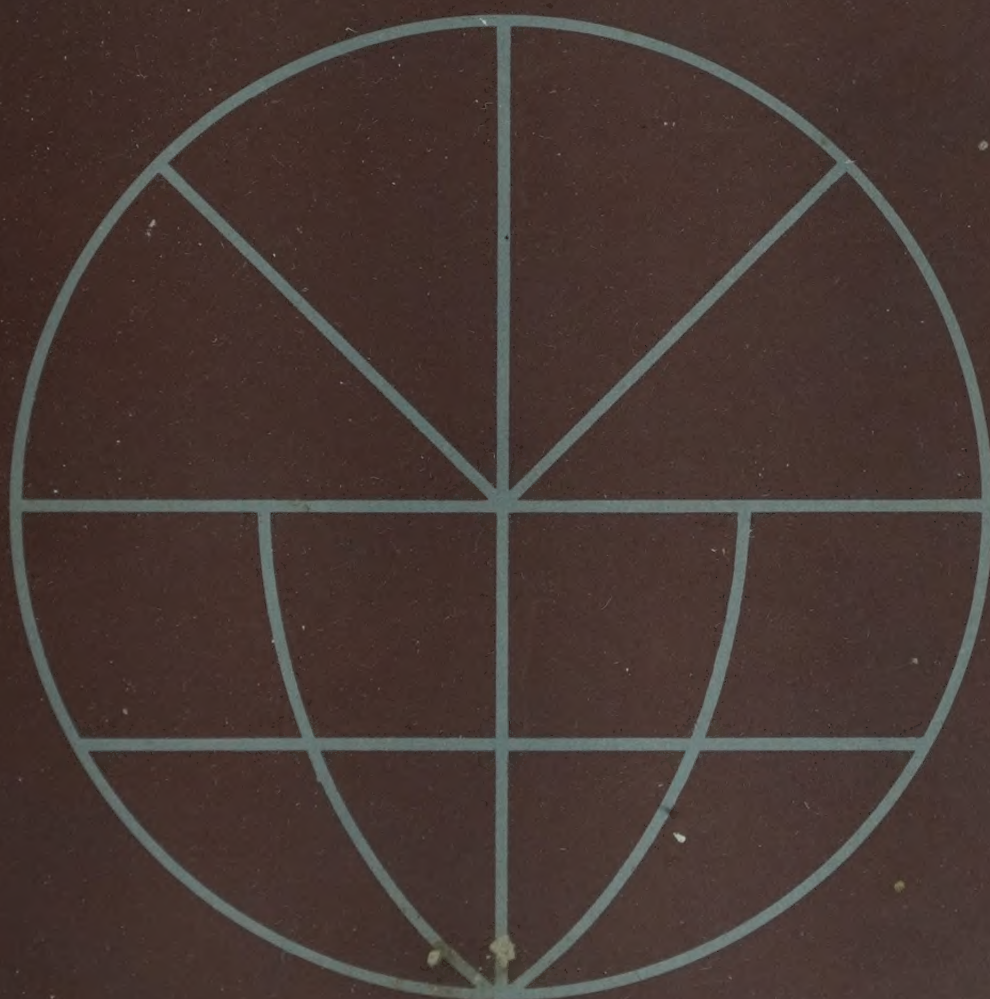


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QUARTERLY



WINTER 1991



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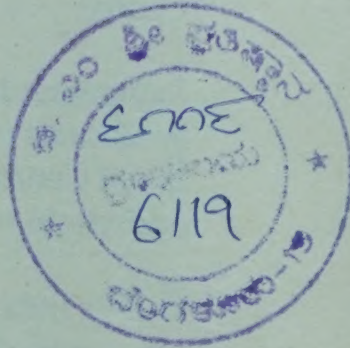
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india international centre  
QUARTERLY

WINTER 1991



ISSN No. 0376-9771



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The India International Centre Quarterly is published four times each year from 40 Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi 11003, where all correspondence may be sent. Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Centre.

Payments should be made by money order or bank draft or cheque payable to India International Centre at New Delhi. Enquiries may be addressed to Ashok Rana, tel.: 619431, Ext. 309.

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The India International Centre QUARTERLY is printed and published by N.H. Ramachandran for India International Centre, at Pauls Press, E 44/11, Okhla Industrial Area Phase II, New Delhi 110 020. Phone: 636411, 635615

WINTER 1991

Volume 18, Number 4

Price for this issue Rs. 25

Annual Subscription for 1991-1992

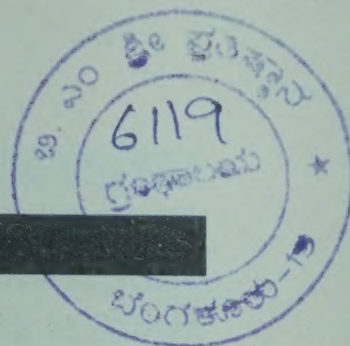
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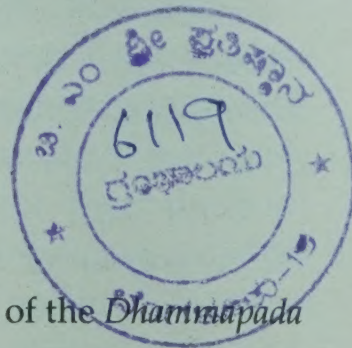
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*All that we are is the result  
of what we have thought:  
it is founded on our thoughts,  
it is made up of our thoughts.*



—First verse of the *Dhammapadam*

**T**his truly existential statement, so contemporary in its outlook, laid the foundations of both Buddhist philosophy and human conduct—allowing considerable freedom of choice to men and women to determine the direction of their lives.

By extension it might be said that a community, a culture, a nation is shaped in its essential character and its destiny by its contribution to the history of ideas. Every civilisation has been given substance by the life, breath, form and sustenance of its thought. This perhaps is our most valuable asset—even though it may be unfashionable to say so in the closing decade of the twentieth century when we are assailed by problems of the immediate future: of survival of the individual, of resources, of the nation-state.

There is no doubt that we have come full circle and arrived at a watershed in time, in the evolution of ideologies. The disintegration of values has witnessed over the last three or four years an incredible reversal of political systems, resulting in phenomenal changes in the world order. One inevitable development has been the drastic changes of state structures in the Soviet Union, examined in two papers in this journal. Another, more immediately at hand, is the pervasive sense of disillusionment about the nation-state, with repercussions within India and a total subversion of national identity.

There is need for a reappraisal of the old systems and a search for new beginnings. This is evident in the philosophy of Post-Modernism which eschews the old humanist tradition of the west that rested securely for so many centuries on the principles of 'reality', rationality and anthropocentrism. The old blueprint for a moral order is now dead; and the search goes on, exploring precepts in the east as much as in the west: to understand the nature and purpose of man in relation to the universe.



Enigmatically, it is not necessarily the most 'advanced' or technological states which have enriched us with profound concepts. The archetypal notion of the Australian Aborigines as living in some primitive backwaters has to yield now to the recognition that through their notion of 'dreamtime' they have offered us one possible panacea for the competition of limited resources. To quote from the author who describes himself as the 'first Australian Aboriginal missionary to the western world':

These Aboriginal people seem to have realized the disastrous consequences of autonomy and self-sufficiency on an individual or group basis which set people one against the other in competition for scarce resources. Instead, they established institutions which would prevent it. In consequence they lost the "advantages" of such a release of individual freedom, namely economic growth and development.

One perhaps more acceptable resolution offered is that of modern-day Buddhism, which rediscovers the concept of compassion and extends it to a positive and informed altruism for all: for the brotherhood of mankind. Surprisingly, this principle could be as effective in the world of commerce as much as international relations between nations, as in the everyday exchange between individuals. With the award of the Nobel Peace Prize, this becomes the guideline for the newly-established Foundation for Universal Responsibility that has been set up by the Dalai Lama of Tibet.

'Knowledge is not an end in itself but a means to the end'. In our interview with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we explored a range of philosophical queries: the scope of dialectical reasoning which begins with scepticism and arrives at firm foundations of conviction; the 'training' of the mind to reach the ultimate stage of *Shunyata*, emptiness; the theory of karma and the potential enlightenment of every mortal being. Most of all, there pervades the genial sense of compassion required for any kind of genuine understanding—of reaching out from one to another of human warmth and affection—which is manifest in a most effective and engaging manner in the person of the Dalai Lama himself. When all else fails, it is humility and laughter that invokes response at the deepest level: the laughter of complicity, of compassion.

As proposed by Akhtar Qamber in her paper here, if different religions and philosophies ever find a meeting point, it would be at

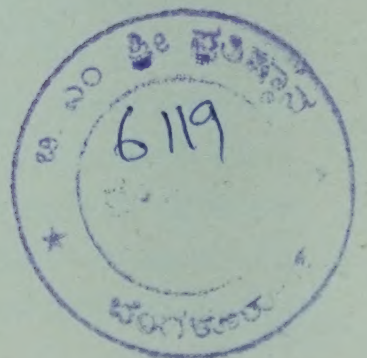


a mystical level in a Zen monastery or a Sufi *Khanqah*—in a timeless, universal, spiritual experience that transcends history, geography and our immediate culture. Despite their intrinsic differences in thought, there is an essential bond in the goals and in the universality of experience.

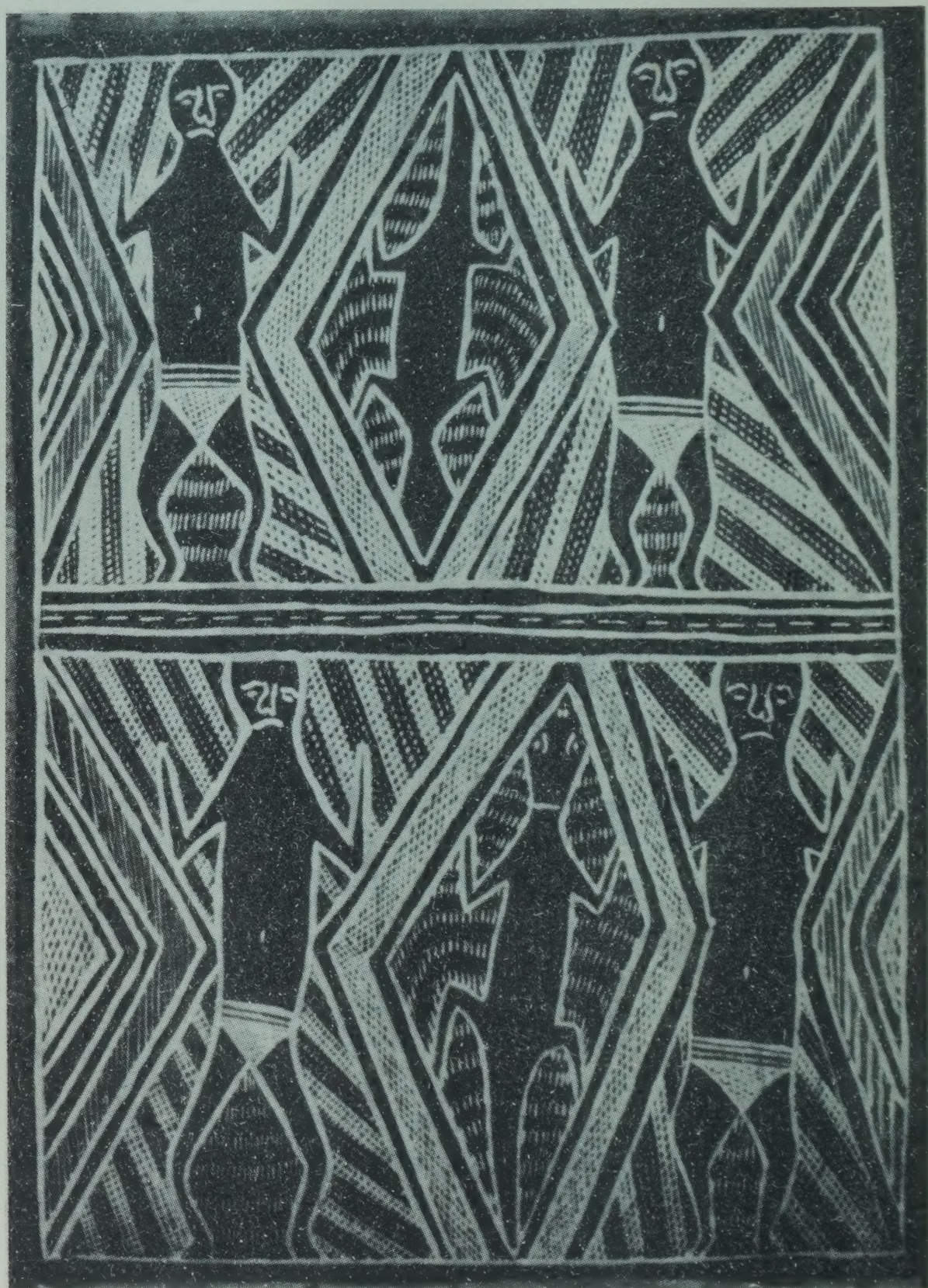
However, the foundations are laid in classical learning. "The mysticism of Plotinus and Porphyry would not have come into being without Plato, nor Zen without Buddhism, nor Sufism without Islam." Institutions of learning which allow for the cross-fertilisation of ideas are perhaps the happiest meeting ground for an effective communication between cultures. This is what developed innovation and originality of thought in the ancient Library and Mouseion at Alexandria: where the west met the east.

Such could be our endeavour today here, in India at the India International Centre. Without premeditated intent, this issue of the *Quarterly* brings you a series of essays which focus on the history of ideas and the horizons of thought across the world from the Aborigines of Australia to the Ptolemaic period in Egypt, from the practice of Sufism to Tibetan Buddhism, from the philosophy of Post-Modernism to Semiotics. Incidentally, the language of symbolism is as inherent in the Indian tradition as it is being explored in the western study of semiotics. This is why we have deemed it fit to illustrate the paper with images that are drawn from everyday life in India!

*Geeti Sen.*



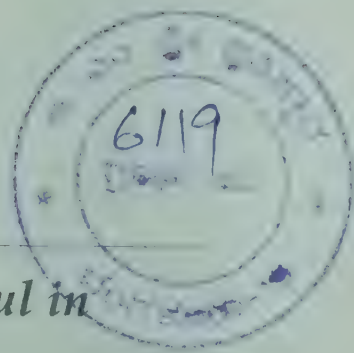




*Bark painting depicting the origins of the Durilla*



DAVID H. TURNER



*Dreamtime: Life, Afterlife and the Soul in  
Australian Aboriginal Religion*

**I**t seems ironic to be designated the first Australian Aboriginal missionary to the Western world—by a people whose religion rejects proselytization because it sees all of humanity as subject to the same Grand Design. But the coming of Europeans to Australia in the late eighteenth century fractured Aboriginal beliefs in a universal humanity. Europeans came to take, and taking without giving went against that Design. Europeans, even the Christian missionaries, did not see that Design and thus did not activate it in the world. After I was put through the second stage of initiation by the Aboriginal people of Groote Eylandt in northern Australia in 1986, some 20 years after I first contacted them, I was told to go out and show Europeans that Design so they would do a better job of living in the world—really of living with others in the world. Normally after going through adult initiation one has to stay with them. But the elders had a meeting and decided I was much more use to them, and to Europeans, outside than inside.

Following the Grand Design did not mean returning to hunting and gathering for a living—the Aborigines' traditional lifestyle. It meant rather to set in motion the same forces the Aborigines and their forebears had set in motion to ensure peaceful coexistence between people here on earth. This meant activating spiritual and aesthetic forms which we would consider "beliefs" but that Aborigines consider real. Aborigines could see and hear them; Europeans apparently could not. But I had, after some coaching. There was hope.

Before I delve in more detail into what all this means, an introductory word or two on the Australian Aborigines and their origins. Truth is, a word or two is all that is possible. Anthropologists really don't know all that much about where these people came from. When I was doing my Ph D at the University of Western Australia in 1969–70 the experts thought that the Aborigines had arrived on the



Australian continent from south-east Asia about 30,000 years ago. A decade later the date had been pushed back to 40,000 years. It now stands at about 80,000 and there are hints that the Aborigines may have come to the continent some 130,000 years ago. In the late 1960s their place of ultimate origin was thought to be south India. Physically, they are closer to Dravidian peoples. Now, however, some anthropologists believe they came originally from China, emerged as *homo sapiens* (modern man) on the Australian continent and then migrated back up through south-east Asia and perhaps into India.

An archaeologist friend of mine at the South Australian Museum, Graeme Pretty, has put forth the radical suggestion that the Aborigines didn't come originally from anywhere but Australia itself. He thinks that man may have originated independently in Australia. We may eventually turn up evidence of pre-human primates in Australia. Up to now we really haven't looked, he says. The point he is trying to make is that we always think we know more than we actually do. We know so little about Aboriginal origins that almost anything is possible.

One shouldn't be misled by this discussion into believing that Australia, before the advent of the Europeans, was some kind of primitive backwater, a prehistoric reminder of what we once were. My own work amongst the Aborigines rather indicates that in Aboriginal Australian culture, we see evidence of what we could become.

The Australian Aborigines, I have concluded, arrested technological and economic development in the interests of peaceful accommodation between human beings and between humans and the natural environment. They did so in ways unimaginable to Europeans. One way was to hold property and material resources in such a way that they had to be renounced to others. Aborigines set boundaries on the land which enclosed exclusive resources (water here, yams there, an animal habitat somewhere else) and prohibited their consumption to those "owning" the land. Thus, no single individual or group could be autonomous and self-determining but was dependent on others for survival.

Another way was to symbolically associate the people who owned the land with the exclusive resource within its bounds as their "totem", and then prohibit that resource to them as food. Yet another way was to space relatively large numbers of people in relatively small territories (landforms) containing so few resources that, again,



self-sufficiency was impossible.

These Aboriginal people seem to have realized the disastrous consequences of autonomy and self-sufficiency on an individual or group basis which set people one against the other in competition for scarce resources. Instead, they established institutions which would prevent it. In consequence they lost the “advantages” of such a release of individual freedom, namely economic growth and development. Hence the Aborigines remained at a stone age level of development until the European occupation. What they gained, though, was something missing from most societies—especially those in the so-called “modern world”—namely the absence of organised warfare for the purposes of acquiring resources or eliminating other people. The Aborigines, however, did not altogether eliminate killing; people were some times killed for breaking the rules that kept the peace. What killing there was, then, was ironic.

When we move into the world of the Grand Design that made peaceful coexistence possible, we move into the world of the Aboriginal “dreamtime”—although dreams have very little to do with it. I use quotation marks around dreamtime because the word is a mistranslation of the Aranda word *altjira* which means “eternally uncreated”. The Aranda are an Aboriginal people of central Australia. Aborigines do attach significance to some dreams; in dreams one can sometimes trace the journey of the soul as it travels about while you are asleep. But this is not the foundation of their religion. The foundation of their religion is rather a perception of forms in nature and society; and these the Aborigines experience while very much awake.

In the shape of the land, natural species and human beings, the Aborigines detect Abiding Presences indicative of a plane of existence beyond the material which nevertheless has implications for material existence. What they see (and hear) is not easy to describe—in English at any rate.

The Aborigines describe things and people as circumscribed and illuminated, exhibiting a quality that transcends the individual features of the thing or person, yet somehow defines it. Prior to 1986 I knew about this but had no experience of it myself. Even the Aboriginal language failed to communicate it to me. The only way to understand it, they said, was to experience it directly myself. I would not see it in normal, everyday circumstances, but I might in extreme circumstances.



In songs about the rainbow serpent that I recorded some 20 years ago, the phrase “the waves are laughing, the waves are laughing” cropped up again and again. I had always wondered how waves could laugh. So I asked an Aboriginal friend of mine, Murabuda. He couldn’t really *tell* me in words, he said, but if I went down to the sea in the dry season when the east wind was blowing its strongest and the tide was coming in, and I looked out over the open water, I would see what they saw and understand how waves could laugh.

The appropriate circumstances materialized late one afternoon when I was on one of the outer islands. I headed down to the beach and looked out over the wide expanse of the Gulf of Carpentaria to the east. The waves were laughing. I don’t know how to explain it. All I know is I just sat there on the beach chuckling away to myself—laughing with the waves. What I actually saw was waveform, its Abiding Presence repeated again and again and again countless times as a separate dimension—as an illumination—over and above the flow of the waves themselves. The experience really had five levels. First was the experience of water—matter—itsself as it formed into waves. The second was the impression of waves as such. The third was the perception of waves as a discernible form. The fourth stage was the perception of the Form of each wave as another plane of existence over and above the water itself. A fifth and final stage was the form of those Forms, a singleness of form that defined each and every wave as a wave. This, though was my conceptual imposition on the scene—a projection beyond the scene, not something I actually saw. (Later I wondered if monotheism, the idea of an ultimate One, may not have had its origins in such a misperception of reality). Add to this scene of wave Forms the dynamic of “spitting” as the Aborigines call it, the wisp of whitecap on each wave suggestive of force and motion, and the overall impression is not so much of water—matter—passing through waveForms, as of waveForm(s) *expelling* matter—spitting it out—one to the other.

Aborigines take this perception of Forms in relation to contents or matter as a sign of intent toward man. We should live in and as Forms expelling content, one to the other: my things to you, yours to me, my Land’s resources to you, yours to me. Through this process peaceful coexistence is to be achieved. For if you have “nothing” there is nothing to be taken from you.

Aborigines also take their experience of Forms or Presences as a window to another dimension of existence into which we pass on



death with the physical disintegration of the body. The window is opened to the living when someone close to them dies. Grief and suffering strip one of one's cultural filters and open one up to deeper levels of perception and reality. This is accessed by music and singing. As they sing, songmen reach inside themselves to an inner experience of Form or Presence and reach through it to another dimension of existence. People (and other species) are not only enFormed but inFormed and what is inFormed and enFormed is spirit or soul (inside, it is within the womb of womanForm and its equivalent space in man)

Humans (and other species) have two souls: one outside and enFormed, another inside and inFormed. When the body dies, one's soul or spirit is released to pass out of Form and over to the "other side". This spirit is called *amugwa* which also means "quickening" or "enlivening". For example *angwurra amugwa* is "hot glowing coals", or rather "the hotness and glowingness of the coals". The soul defined by outerForm, by contrast, remains in place even after the disintegration of the body to await the appearance of a new body which will infill it and eventually house a new inner soul. It is as if a person's shadow remained behind after a person died. In fact the word *awarawalya*, which means "spirit", can also be translated as "shadow" or "shade" and is the name for the bough shelter under which the songmen sit during mortuary ceremonies (see photo).

Existence as a whole is to these Aborigines like a rubber band passing through a waterfall which is stretched to its limit and then rotated from one side over to the other. Each of us comes across to "this side", assumes an embodied form, lives, dies, and then returns to a fixed point on the "other side". The "other side", is a mirror image of "this side". "Over there", you (your inner soul) remain in place while Forms or Presences pass around you or through you, perhaps shaping and reshaping you into whatever they may be; a humanForm, a speciesForm or a natureForm.

Besides shaping and inter-connecting spirits on the "other side", the Forms there also "expel" them back to "this side" when Form coincides with the content appropriate to its shape. (My Hindu readers will immediately see that it is not far from this to a vision of reincarnation, not only of humans but also of, and as, other species. That is, spirit-Form might well succeed in reshaping a particular spirit-content or soul into its own image at which point it would be propelled back to "this side" through the archetypal pathway of its





*Songman sitting under a bough singing during a mortuary ceremony*



*Dancer representing curlew (a type of bird) during a mortuary ceremony*



outer-Form which is simultaneously on both “sides”.)

In their sacred ceremonies in which they remember their dead, the Aborigines carve images not of actual ancestors or ancestresses but of the archetypal or prototypical spirit-Forms some of which are human and others natural. The image represents both a spirit-being in the singular and a line of people in the plural. These are all the generations of people who embody the spirit in question as well as all people in the same generation who embody the same *kind* of spirit. Amongst the people of Groote Eylandt the belief was once prevalent that the spirit reincarnated until the person in question made it through all seven stages in the life cycle ending as *Na:niyarrengga* or “one whose hair has turned white and is starting to use a walking stick”. If he or she did progress this far his or her spirit remained on the “other side” forever. If not, it returned to “try again”. Indeed the whole point of reincarnation seems to have been to see everyone—every spirit—through to this the last stage of human accomplishment. And that accomplishment was to fully understand the nature of the “other side” while on “this side”.

Everyone in Aboriginal society had potential access to this knowledge and everyone could sing and achieve a vision of life on “the other side”. The Aborigines used no drugs to “get there”, nor did they renounce meat, sex or marriage. Nor were there religious specialists who relied on the productivity of others to sustain them on their quest. The Aborigines’ brand of renunciation was not of the world but of the world’s things in the sense that one relinquished what one procured or produced first and foremost to those who had nothing. Since ultimately one *was* “nothing”, or Form/Presence, things and resources were constantly circulating in order to keep one “empty” or pure. One’s Land gave up its resources, one’s Self gave up its possessions, but with one’s own Land and Self always receiving resources and possessions from elsewhere. The first thing I was told by my initiators after my initiation was “You have nothing, everything we have is yours”. This is not a statement about sharing, certainly not about private possession; it is rather about mutual renunciation where each of us retains our respective integrities but gives a part of ourselves up to others.

There is a sense, then, in which everyone had nothing in the way of material resources and every one was dependent on someone else for their livelihood. Hence everyone was vulnerable and potentially threatened. Vulnerability and threatening circumstances are, like



grief and pain, a precondition for the perception of deeper levels of reality, both spiritual and Formal. But the boundaries of other people's Lands were also drawn around exclusive resources and prohibited to them as food. Their resources would eventually flow into your "emptiness". In the final analysis, then, vulnerability and threat were an illusion, but an illusion that sustained the Aboriginal vision and reinforced the institutions based on that vision, not to mention eliminated the motive for appropriating the territory and resources of others. This was the genius of the Aboriginal way of life.

**A**ccounts of the journey of the soul from "this side" to the "other side" are of particular interest because they are the closest accounts we have to a description of the so-called Dreaming (I do not yet sing myself and therefore have not accessed this dimension). On death the inner-spirit of the deceased is sung over to the "other side" by the men of his or her Land and closely related Lands (or rather by the inner-spirits of these men).

Of all forms of expression, music comes closest to representing existence as a whole. That is, it simultaneously represents life on "this side" as well as afterlife on the "other side". Music consists of melodic lines or fixed Forms summoned up within each songman and then expelled. Outside, music consists of shifting Forms or melodic lines moving around and entering fixed material contents—the songmen and spectators. Aborigines say they actually *see* the tunes they are about to sing out in front of them. They see the melodic line associated with a particular spirit-being along which are strung the words to the song in question. To follow this line is simultaneously to follow a spirit-route (really a prototype extension from one side into the other) and take a geographical journey through the actual country of the prototype in question.

To "pick up" the tune is simultaneously to see it outside oneself and to summon it up inside oneself, then along with one's in-Formed spirit, to expel it on one's breath to join the sound of the dronepipe which introduces and accompanies every song with spirit-specific sounds of its own. The dronepipe sound takes the songman's voice, his inner-soul and the soul of the dead person, across to the "other side" to meet the Song and other spirits of the dead there. The dronepipe is a perfect vehicle to lead this journey as it is a "mirroring" instrument, played by simultaneously breathing out while breathing



in to produce a repetitive, chantlike, sound.

(The Aboriginal people with whom I have lived only sing on someone's death and there is obviously some connection between music and the grieving process. The summoning up of musical forms within oneself as performer, and the inculcation of these forms from outside oneself as audience, seem to be a means of emptying oneself of the content of that part of the dead person that is within you as well as of replacing him or her with a "contentless", musical Form, which in turn reinforces the opening that has been created by the pain and suffering that has allowed you access to the "other side".)

The songmen begin their journey with the spirit at the place where the person has been buried and sing to a special place in his or her Land. From here the songmen take the spirit, swimming in the form of a fish, to Wuragwugwa, a kind of gateway to the "other side". In the Groote Eylandt area it is located in the sea just beyond Amburrgba, North East Island, off the north-east coast of Groote. From here stretch three parallel roads: one for the spirits of humans, another for those of dingos or wild dogs, and a third for those of other animals. On a rock at the juncture of these roads sits a man called Nangberdangberda playing a *jiraga* or dronepipe.

Nangberdangberda looks down into the water and sees something bright swimming like a fish. He reaches for his hooked spear, *ma:nunggwa*, and just as he is about to hurl it at the object it is transformed into the shape of a human. Nangberdangberda uses the spear to lift the spirit out of the water. He lays the spirit on the ground among a swarm of ants, *jua:ba*, which bite and revive it. Thus rejuvenated, the spirit is shown the proper path to the "other side" by Nangberdangberda, and is warned that he (for purposes of this discussion) is soon to encounter enemies who will want to fight him.

Walking down the road the spirit eventually comes upon two old women making burrawong damper or bread. They ask him, "How are the people you have left behind?" And he replies, "I left them in good order." They give him food and water and warn him of the dangers ahead. As he walks along he sees smoke rising in the distance and thinks of the premonitions of the old women and Nangberdangberda. From the other direction, a frilly lizard, *dugulawawa*, sees him coming down the road and picking up his hooked spears, tells his brothers, "This is my enemy—I am going to fight him." *Dugulawawa* runs toward the spirit and spears him in the thigh, but *yuwadja:ra* (a small lizard), *derrangga* (another small



lizard), *yaradja* (goanna), and *yigarma* (another lizard), pull it out and carry the spirit to their home where they keep him for two days until he recovers. Then they tell him to leave because the frilly lizard wants to fight him again.

Later on, *yimarndagwaba*, a blue-tongued lizard, sees the spirit approaching and, picking up his fighting staff, runs toward him. But just before he is able to strike a blow, *demernganiya:ndawiya*, dragonflies, stop him and tie him to his fighting staff. The spirit passes by unharmed and eventually comes upon a large billabong where he refreshes himself by drinking, swimming and eating some lilyroots. Continuing on, he eventually encounters a man standing beside two trees, one tall and the other short. The man tells him that he has to climb one of the trees if he wishes to continue his journey.

At this point in the journey the songmen stop singing and sit in a group for a few hours watching each other for signs as to which of the two trees the spirit has climbed. If the people are still sad and do not want the spirit of the man to leave, he will climb the small tree from which extends a road back to his home on earth. If, on the other hand, the people are happy, he will climb the tall tree which leads him on to the "other side". If the songmen decide that the spirit has gone to the "other side", they pause for a few days then sing all of the spirits from the "other side", including the dead person's, to the real world for the next sequence of rites (one of the reasons that Aboriginal people don't like to view a photo of a dead person is *not* that they think it contains the dead person's spirit; they think it will rekindle the grief and sense of loss in themselves and attract the spirit in question back to the land of the living).

What are we to make of this journey to the "other side"? In the first place, there is no clear evidence that it is an imaginative construct. That is, the tale does not code according to mytho-logic. Its logic runs *mediation*→*weakeners*, or constraints on violence removed→*opposition*, or violence begins to emerge→*separation and withdrawal from the implications*. Mytho-logic, by contrast, runs *opposition*→*mediation*→*weakening of opposition*→*illusion of solution to problem*. Mytho-logic is mystification, even delusion. In the Aboriginal tale of the journey to the "other side" opposition is potential from the outset and is, in part, realised. But it is not fulfilled. Mediators help the spirit to separate and withdraw, or rather move on to join other spirits of his Land who have preceded him. Moreover, the violence potential in the situation is always on an individual-to-individual, rather than



an individual-to-group basis thereby diminishing its intensity. In the tale, then, we don't really have opposition, mediation, illusions to solutions to problems, or separation and withdrawal. It is almost as if the tale is a stylised version of a very real afterlife journey through one's worst fears about the possibility of violence breaking loose what with real-society constraints now left behind to a place or plane of existence where those fears are finally forever laid to rest.

What do we learn of Dreamtime existence from this account? Man's spirit is reshaped by the Form of fish and is illuminated to be re-Formed again as a man. This transformation saves him from the spear of Nangberdangberda. The playing of the dronepipe by Nangberdangberda acts as a guide for the spirit as it does for the songmen and has a particular quality which, as I've said, seems to represent the very essence of the Dreaming: it is sound without words, pure melody or tune, the sound produced by "mirroring" in the sense that one must breathe in and breathe out simultaneously through mouth and nose to get the proper sound. This is to simultaneously expire and enliven.

Two old women sustain the spirit on its journey and warn him of the dangers ahead. Thus the spirit has plenty of time to prepare him for these dangers; but when attacked he does not retaliate but rather relies on the goodwill of others to save him. The Dreaming, then, is ultimately peaceful.

Though we only have hints here of the nature of Dreamtime ("other side") existence, we at least know from this account (and other statements I have from Aborigines) what it is not. It is not some kind of super-intelligence, some kind of cosmic consciousness of which humans are a manifestation and with which they merge after death. The "other side" is as differentiated as animate and inanimate life on "this side", theoretically with the same kind of connectedness between individuals and groups (though "over there", Forms move between contents instead of contents between Forms to achieve part-of-one-in-the-other interdependence).

If this is what the "Dreaming" is, then how did it all begin? What are its origins? In the beginning, Aborigines say, was spiritual substance (*amawurrena-alawudawarra*) in the Form of melodic songlines differentiated and become manifest in human, animal and natural forms. As these spirit-beings moved over the then-undifferentiated landscape they left something of themselves in their wake to give the land its differentiated quality (transforming it





*Bark painting depicting the origins of the Wurramarrba*



into Lands). Real natural species in one stream and real humans in another originated—and still continue to originate in a spiritual sense—in the spiritual substance left by these beings. The time when this happened is simply referred to as “a long, long, time ago”; but what was there then is still with us today though in another dimension. It is just that today (or any time after the beginning) a human-natural-landscape has emerged as a mirrored incarnation of the “other side”. The purpose of life on “this side” is not only to realise the nature of the “other side” but also to bring life on “this side” into mirrored concert with it.

Aborigines, then, are not content with seeing the Grand Design. Having seen it they are concerned to recreate it by creating and imposing Forms—boundaries—on the Landscape and on each other and by then contriving laws that ensure a proper relation between these Forms and their respective material contents. Hence the boundaries around exclusive resources, hence the prohibition on marriage with a person from the same Land as oneself, hence the rule that the children of the woman who gives them birth belong neither to her nor her Land but to her husband and his Land. (In this sense Aboriginal women are not really the mothers of the children they bear, just as the fathers are not really their fathers: spiritual identity is all important and this is fixed by the woman’s husband. Neither parent is believed to contribute anything of substance to the physical makeup of the child. Here it is not so much that Aborigines are ignorant of the physical process of procreation, as that it is irrelevant to the order of society. Human relations are Formally or spiritually, not materially, determined.)

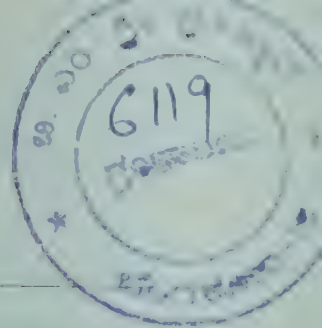
Artistically the Aboriginal Grand Design as I have described it here is best represented by line rather than circle. Lines parallel and intersect without merging and stretch to infinity. Circles enclose and enfold and separate one (circle) from another. Line is the foundation of traditional Aboriginal art in most of Australia (an exception being amongst Western Desert Aborigines whose culture I am not discussing here). It can be seen in the two Aboriginal bark paintings depicted in the photographs. In the first, from Groote Eylandt, single figures have been placed on a blank background, except that that the background isn’t really blank. It is a “nothingness” representing the “Dreamtime”. In the other, from the adjacent manland, lineal designs cover the entire background, but again



represent the "Dreamtime".

**A**s I am sure you can appreciate by now, it is difficult to summarise such a complex and unfamiliar culture as the Australians' in a few pages. However, if I'm to bring their message to a wider audience I must try. Unfamiliarity, though, is not something that attracts a readership. Most people prefer the familiar represented in a slightly different way. Australian Aboriginal culture is almost totally unfamiliar to most Europeans. Euro-American society is materialistic in the extreme. Materialism clouds the vision and vision is what Aboriginal culture is all about. In this sense Aborigines do not really have a religion. They simply report what they see and hear. It is just that we do not see and hear what they do. So we say they have a religion, or a set of *beliefs* about the transcendent rather than a deeper insight into reality which is what we would say if we saw it ourselves. But I am a European and I have now seen and heard most of what the Aborigines do. What began as a research enterprise for me some 20 years ago evolved into a spiritual journey into a world that had always been there, in and around me, but which I had not sensed. I suspect that under specified circumstances most of you could sense it too. I suspect that there is more in the Indian tradition that enables one to sense it than in the European. But that is another story.





*Corporate Communication and Art: Uneasy Alliance, Emerging Imperatives\**

When the present century was young, we used to assert its place at the forefront of time, using the words twentieth century with a modernist pride. And no wonder, because in manifold ways, it gave us a new sense of the power of man and the inevitability of his progress. The industrial revolution caused a dramatic increase in the standard of living in the West, skyscrapers rose to incredible heights, air travel became a matter of routine in a world that seemed smaller every day what with first the cinema and then television. Empires of old collapsed; the defeat of Nazism consolidated democratic ideals. The Russian and Chinese revolutions proved the power of an idea. Marxism's indirect effect was the emergence of the welfare state and the modification of capitalism to ensure that man's basic needs were met regardless of ideologies. If all countries had not achieved that condition, it was only a matter of time before they did. Freud gave us a new awareness of ourselves and a realistic knowledge of what goes on inside us. Einstein made us think in terms of cosmic stretches of time and space. From the conquest of nature that had started with the industrial revolution, man set himself to the conquest of space. Not only the resources of the earth but those of space had to be exploited. This exploitation was seen as man's right as the foremost known living being in the universe.

These are the verities within which advertising was born and brought up and came increasingly to be seen as a technique of communication harnessed to the task of bringing about progress. We saw it as especially so in the newly decolonised areas where it was a

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\* Paper presented at the Fifth Sanat Lahiri Memorial Lecture organised by the Public Relations Society of India, Calcutta Chapter at Nandan 21 April, 1989.



part of the process of education, urbanisation and modernisation. Advertising and the new communication techniques developed from a syncretist use of the knowledge of many arts and a new ability to harness them in terms of the need to be filled. Writing gained by learning to say more by saying less, painting by learning to get down to essentials. Indeed the syncretism of advertising was found to be very like that of cinema, both being at their best when nourished by an all-round acquaintance with the traditional arts. It was for this reason that, besides Satyajit Ray, others like Shyam Benegal moved easily from advertising to film making.

Advertising spearheaded the growth of the service sector, a sign of progress from the dominant occupation, first of agriculture and then of industry, in the developing economics. It has also been the main instrument of consumer education and the spread of modern concepts in health promotion and other important areas. During World War II, propaganda skills largely derived from advertising experience played an important role in the victory of the allied forces. After the war, its socially purposeful role became most evident in the decolonised, newly independent countries in aid of consumer industries which had so far enjoyed a protected monopoly market but after Independence began to face increasingly stiff competition.

Also, the range of consumer goods began to expand rapidly. On the 15th of August, 1947, if you went to New Market in Calcutta or Crawford Market in Bombay, you would not find anything made in India; by the sixties, you would find almost nothing that was not made in India. With such a rapid transformation of the market, advertising had to be pressed into urgent service. The public sector too grew in scale at what Nehru termed the commanding heights of the economy. But it increasingly faced criticism on account of its long gestation period, its dilemma of matching social benefits with profits in rendering account to the public, and its low productivity which constantly pushed up costs. What could deliver it from this defensive prison except skilful public relations?

Thus, in all aspects of the economy, marketing, advertising and public relations skills came into demand and enhanced the self image of the highly educated fraternity engaged in it which now began to see its work as a form of communication comparable to other modes of it, such as the information media and the arts. As the cost of production increased, media became more and more



dependent on advertising, making it central to much of the communication system. In the eighties, state-owned television opted for programmes sponsored by advertisers. Today for all practical purposes, it is the advertiser and not the state authority who decides what can or can't be shown on television. The production resources and inputs multiplied enormously, creating a gulf between the quality of the state-produced programmes and those sponsored by the corporate sector. Public support naturally went in favour of the sponsored programme with its more sophisticated production quality and a sharper marketing sense which gauged public reactions more scientifically. Thus corporate communication became king. It now commands the entire range of media from the printed to the electronic, much as in Europe, the United States and Japan.

India's urban areas and their rural periphery represent such a large market and rapid growth of consumption in absolute terms that its percentage relation to the total population has never materially affected its rate of growth. Nor has it had to devote much thought to the question of how the other half lives.

But today, as our century draws to a close, the world-wide picture has changed. The decline of the century has raised very serious questions about many of the assumptions on which the earlier euphoria was based. Naturally this began in the West, where the industrial revolution itself had begun. Indeed what is being questioned is not merely the premises of the industrial revolution but its source in the European Renaissance and the promises of modern science extending back to its beginnings with Francis Bacon. Much, if not all, of what was seen earlier as progress appears today to have been an illusion. The conquest of nature appears to be a suicidal concept; modern science seems an instrument of destruction; material progress seems of doubtful benefit in the face of a meaningless proliferation of wants on which much of economic growth is coming to depend. The world seems more divided than ever. The possibility of total nuclear destruction looms large. The Marxist promise has faded. It has become clear that it offers no total philosophy of human regeneration. After its violent shortcuts have achieved *roti-kapda-makan* for more or less all, it runs out of momentum unless it backtracks to capitalist production and marketing based on the profit motive. What is more, change in the class of ownership of the means of production does not solve basic problems; the means of production themselves are guilty. The socialised labour that is decreed



by mass production itself fragments the individual identity and takes away all creativity from the vast majority of the people. The profit motive on which the success of mass production ultimately depends, promotes ruthless competition and the disruption of values binding people together within a community of give and take and mutual respect, live and let live. What we have exalted to the level of communication is actually not the two-way process of communication at all but an instrument of manipulation by the owner of the instrument. It is becoming clear that our obsession with size and equation of what is big with what is good is only a manifestation of pride. The institution of the nation-state seems to be the egotistic source of global conflict which could lead to the total destruction of humanity. This is not to imply that the world as we have known it is crashing around our ears; but that within the heart of our times, a process of rethinking and change has begun. The dust of confusion, inevitable before decisive movements, is rising.

The student revolts in the campuses of the West in 1968 gave the first major signal of the feeling of the younger generation in the affluent countries that all was not right with the world they had inherited from their elders. The effects of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki took time to sink into the consciousness. Once it did, the destruction of the human race suddenly became a real possibility. It stretched a dark cloud across the mental landscape before which unthinking humans played out their daily search for ever-new illusions of happiness. Or so it seemed to those who looked beyond the immediate. The failure of American intervention in Vietnam fuelled the increasing discontent and disillusion. Even the hippies, the Flower People and the other dropouts were signs of the rejection of established social values. Meanwhile, the crisis in socialist countries showed up the failure of the Gods that had been set up in place of Mammon, and revealed the oneness of humanity in the anticipation of what might be absolute disaster.

Inevitably, the values whose pursuit had led to this predicament became highly suspect. Conquest of nature, the war cry of science for five hundred years, sounded hollow in the context of a new awareness of ecological realities that had resulted from the view of nature as an object of exploitation. Suddenly one saw wisdom in those who had asked the earth, one and a half millenia ago, to forgive them for treading upon it (*Padasparsham kshamaswa may*). As the place with the world's highest rainfall suffered from an acute shortage of



drinking water, realisation began to dawn that the ancient Khasi reverence for forests had a meaning that missionaries, scientists and engineers had taken away from them. Today environmentalists are saying that the Khasi idea of the sacred forests, which human beings were not allowed to enter, is the same as of a biosphere reserve in which nature is allowed to work its processes of generating oxygen, storing up underground water, creating new species of plants and conserving the old, building up fertile soils—without human contamination.

By the seventies a new awareness of ecological values had led to new laws in the United States and in Europe. The Hippie generation donned ties and jackets to become Yuppies and Yumpies, but the new hedonism did not remove the dark cloud of disillusion. It merely reflected the acceptance of inevitabilities and a resolve to make hay while the sun shone.

It is possible to see the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Iran in 1979, despite its obscurantist elements, as a protest against western ways of life and as an urge to recover certain values before they were lost forever in the name of progress. Although Islamic fundamentalism has many faces and is far from being a monolith menacing democracy, some aspects of it have manifested in varying degrees and combinations throughout the Islamic world. There is a certain sharing of the sense of danger to traditional concepts of morality, family ties, and norms of public behaviour represented by what went by the name of science and progress.

I saw Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* in a New York miniature theatre with a group of hardheaded Hollywood executives and seasoned journalists. When they wept shamelessly in certain scenes, I realised that if Gandhi had not existed the West, and the world wedded to its values, would have had to invent him. The secret need for the Gandhian idea of non-violence and of the purity of means as an end in itself had become central within the soul of modern man. Only he did not know how to change the set conditions of his life in order to turn towards it.

In other words, the verities of the early twentieth century and the basis of its faith in the future, have been shaken. As our century draws to an end, we no longer take the same pride in it. In fact, we are wary about what the twenty-first holds in store for us. Will it bring disaster to humanity or will we find a way to correct our course and discover new paths to progress.



Inevitably, in this radically changed context, the problems of communication are being reviewed and new concepts of it are arising. The biggest question is in regard to mass communication. How meaningful is it, anymore? Is it an unmixed blessing? Is it indeed an instrument of democracy, a way for people to understand each other and to express themselves? Here I would like to quote extensively from a paper I wrote sometime ago in trying to frame a communication policy for INTACH, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, which is now concerned with the conservation of both the manmade and the natural heritage and sees the two as part of the same philosophy:

No communication is more complete, more meaningful, than a direct exchange of words—and non-verbal signals—between two persons. Mass communication is by nature impersonal. The giver and the receiver of the message do not, cannot, know each other across vast distances and linguistic-cultural barriers. That is why mass communication has to be devised. It must be regarded strictly as the second-best means, a substitute for personal communication. Its biggest failing can almost never be removed—it is a one-way message. Hence it has been described as the “hypodermic” model of communication in which one who has access to the syringe injects a message into those who don’t. Such access, one must point out, is usually a concomitant of power—power of class and privilege, power to manipulate facts, to suppress some and highlight others. Mass communication is thus tainted by a suspicion of imperialism, being based on inequality. This reduces its persuasive power, because the receiver is instinctively aware of the giver’s power to distort the message and to disregard the receiver’s point of view. Even where it becomes effective in so far as it makes multitudes behave in a certain way, its moral basis is undermined and its success results in a coarsening of the receiver’s sensitivity.

It is, therefore, necessary to deglamourise mass communication before using it. It can be dispensed with more often than we think. In the days before microphones came into use, Gandhiji addressed vast multitudes in open spaces where the people in front conveyed his words to those sitting or standing behind them. Gandhiji chose his words and timed them so as to help this process. It was extremely effective because it involved the receiver of the message in the act of its communication.

Since mass communication has become unavoidable in addressing any large group of people, it is essential to use it in such a



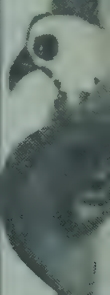
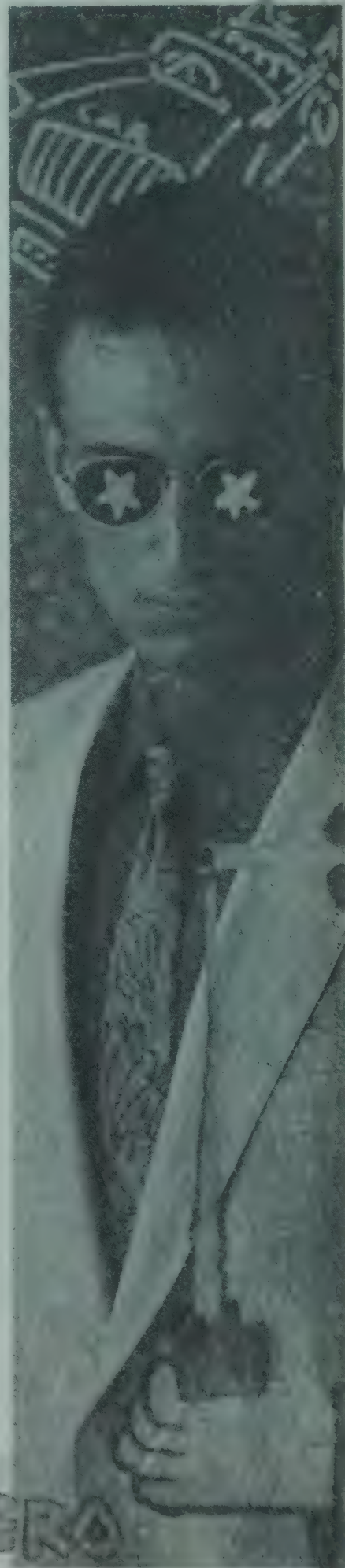
way as to reduce, if not overcome, its faults. Among these is a constant awareness of, and effort to know and understand, the point of view of the receivers of the communication. Only this can bring back something of the character of a two-way traffic into the "hypodermic" or one-way nature of mass communication. No matter how self-evident a message may be to the giver, the receiver may not be ready to understand and believe it because his circumstances are often radically different from the giver's. Successful communication thus begins with the communicator's sense of oneness with those to whom he seeks to communicate. The more the communicator is wrapped up in his own beliefs, the more insulated he is from those of others, the less is his success in communication. The receiver of the message is unable to talk back to him; it is like a telephone connection in which you are able to speak but not to hear. (We should understand this well in India, since it happens so often on our telephone system).

It is true that in modern marketing methods, the consumer's point of view plays an important part in the determination of the style and content of communication of a message. Yet, I submit that this is only a refinement of the process of effective manipulation of minds. It is not two-way communication. In fact the ways of bringing mass communication in line with interpersonal communication have not been found, perhaps because we have not looked for them.

Mass communication, as we practise it, is vastly different from communication in art. Corporate communication uses art, but for purposes very different from art's own. In art, communication takes place at an introspective, spiritual level. When we listen to Malikarjun Mansur singing Malkaus or to Claudio Arrau playing Beethoven's *Apassionata*, the music touches deep urges inside us, resolves conflicts within, and turns our minds inwards. There are music directors today who use Baroque music with advertising quickies. I have heard Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor used in this manner. But naturally corporate communication or product advertising is not expected to fulfil the same purpose as the original music itself. There cannot be any quarrel with that. The real problem arises elsewhere. All worthwhile art is basically honest and moral in purpose; all corporate communication is not.

Not all of advertising is concerned with the education of the public. Most of its practitioners have to contend, at some time or the other, with the compulsion of advocating the useless product and its meaningless refinements—like getting the whole country converted





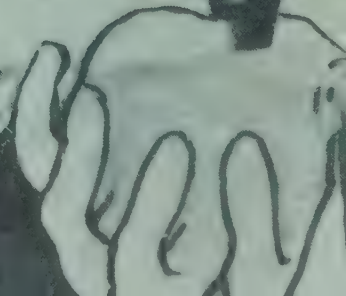
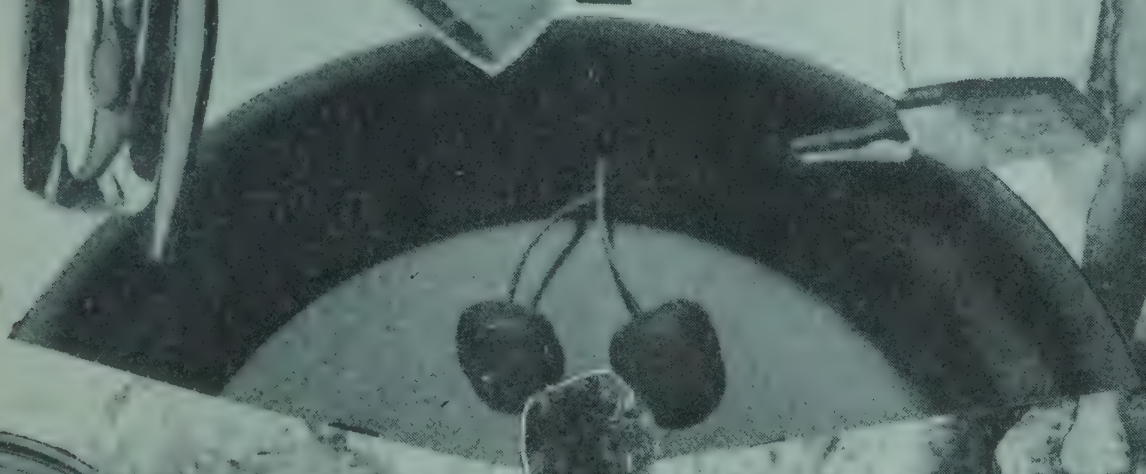




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to some cola or the other, knowing all the while that coconut water is better and it will do a lot of good if its cultivation is increased and it is made available on a wider scale at an accessible price.

Is the tooth brush and the tooth paste really superior to the neem stick? Would it not make more sense to package neem sticks for city-dwellers and leave the countryside to its healthy tradition than to convert everyone to the indestructible plastic tooth brush whose disposal will be a mammoth problem in the future decades? Isn't it surprising that no advertiser has as yet tried to teach the public how to keep the toothbrush clean and germfree and how frequently it should be thrown away? Since even that has not been done, are we not teaching a dirty habit in place of a healthy one in the name of modernisation?

Two basic assumptions seem to underlie today's advertising: (a) that anything made by a machine is more modern and therefore intrinsically superior to anything made by hand; and (b) that anything fashionable in the West is worth imitating in India. It is possible to offer any number of instances of mindless Westernisation in total disregard of the accumulated wisdom of centuries that is available within our tradition. The only exception that meets the eye is the recent promotion of certain herbal products such as Vico Vajradanti or Shahnaz Hussain's beauty aids. On the whole, however, in areas such as apparel and behaviour, our communication industry has promoted an active divorce from tradition and is alienating the younger generation from its cultural identity.

The sudden incursion of a Ramayan or a Mahabharat into this context makes it even worse. Firstly, the nature of treatment of the epics destroys their universality, de-secularises them and turns them into instruments of religious fundamentalism. Secondly, they promote a weird marriage of consumerism with fundamentalism—a very dangerous combination, one that can only be called the breeding ground of Fascism. By undermining rational thought, it encourages people to take to short-cuts.

TV's Mahabharat, for instance, gives a central position to religion that the epic does not have. Later texts like the Harivamsa, composed nearly one thousand years after the early versions of the Mahabharat, have been used to go into the boyhood miracles of Krishna. The sequel of Ramayan, shown on the box as Uttara Rama Katha, jumps from the Valmiki version of the banishment of Sita to that of Tulsidas two thousand years later. The reason is that Rama treats Sita with an



ugly lack of human consideration to which Sita gives a spirited reply in Valmiki. Tulsidas makes Sita beg to be banished in order to save the reputation of the Raghu dynasty, and a loving, tearful Rama finally agrees to the banishment. This white washing of Rama's character and the self-abasement of Sita is enacted in order to support religious beliefs current today, and to undermine the position of woman from the equality the Indian constitution confers on her. In doing so, it also allies itself to the Hindu side of the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute, and encourages an ahistorical view of traditional religious belief. Balsaheb Deoras has declared that neither the Archeological Survey nor the Supreme Court has the right to decide whether the spot concerned was actually the birth place of Rama. The advertisers who sponsor these versions of the epics thus become direct participants in a highly sensitive politico-social issue—on the obscurantist side.

At some stage many of us become aware of the contradiction between our urge towards real communication and the hourly pressure upon us to engage in its opposite. It breeds a sense of guilt inside the psyche. Many an advertising expert is driven, at this point, to a kind of career climacteric. They then seek some outlet for the guilt, in writing, directing plays, collecting art, associating with public service causes or national interest campaigns. The conflict is something like what once raged in the heart of British society with its democracy at home and imperialism abroad. When you come to think of it, it is at this Christian sense of guilt, this Achilles heel that Mahatma Gandhi aimed his non-violent resistance to imperial power. It is this that finally made the British give up the empire.

Is it axiomatic that communication should be amoral and freely available to all to be used for any purpose? Perhaps the greatest communicator of this age was Mahatma Gandhi. When in 1932, the Congress asked him to lead a fresh, final movement against the British, he decided on the march to Dandi to make salt. It was one of the greatest decisions ever made in the history of communication. Its message was so simple that it would reach everyone from the high and the mighty to the lowliest of the low. It made such great news that reporters and photographers from many countries came to watch the event. But it was not an amoral, existentialist, survivalist communication device. At one stroke, Gandhiji had solved the problem of ends and means—by merging them into one. The message was that purity of means is itself the end because once we have learnt



to adopt pure means, we have already made the world a better place. At this point, there is no difference between communication and art. Communication is no longer using art for its own purposes, but has become art.

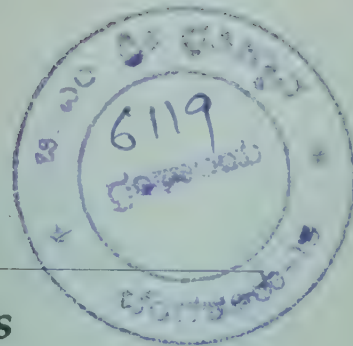
What I am trying to say is that the time has come to rethink communication. There are significant areas outside the ambit of industrialisation and modernisation that cry out for communication support—in saving forests, reducing air and water and noise pollution, promotion of health foods, attitudes of conservation of traditional crafts and skills, understanding of the value of appropriate as opposed to vast technologies, revaluation of the social cost of large dams and other actions leading to massive transfer of resources from the countryside to the city.

Why must communication ally itself to the expansionist, hegemonistic and mindless aspects of so-called progress whose forces were unleashed a long time ago and are being sharply criticised today? The basis on which the present edifice of communication had been built is in the process of fundamental change. If the communication industry listens to the voice of the deep self-questioning that has developed within the world in the second half of this century, it can reorient itself to a new set of emergent values. It can serve a re-definition of the good life, and convert new generations to it. That will be a true entry into the 21st century.



PAUL DOLE

## *Semiology—A Study of Signs*



The importance of an artist is measured by the quantity of new signs which he introduces into the plastic language.

— Matisse <sup>1</sup>

**S**emiology, it must be said, is but one of a group of words used to denote the philosophical and scientific study of meaning from the viewpoint of its communicability. It is the study of the development and role of signs in society, from the Greek *sema* ("sign") and *logos* ("knowledge" or "account"). Semantics, semiotics, semology, semasiology and semiology are all formed from the various derivatives of the Greek verb *semaino*, "to mean" or "to signify". By and large they denote the same subject while claiming slivers of difference in emphasis or angle. Semantics, for example centers on the doctrine of linguistic meaning, while semiology denotes a broader field: the study of sign using behaviour in general. This would include words, images, gestures, objects, musical sounds and complex associations of all of these, to the extent that they constitute systems of signification. At the same time, since language is clearly the most powerful and elaborate of such systems, semiology looks to linguistics for its methodology and its terms of epistemology.

Before exploring the theoretical foundations and analytical methods of linguistics, and by extension semiology, we may begin with a more casual look at the life of signs in society. Signs are everywhere. Their function is to communicate ideas by means of messages. Communication itself has a variety of functions. The referential function, for example is to denote, to convey true, objective information about something. Scientific codes fulfill this function to a maximum, by neutralising all variables and connotative values: the chemical formula NaCl is a message or sign so tightly coded that only





Photo credit: Pradip Saha

### **The Hand**

*The hand has significance in India, evoking many associations and many rituals. It forms the basis of greeting with the hands folded: namaste. It communicates states of emotion and mind through gesture: mudras. In cases the hand can offer benediction and protection and instruction. The convention so ingrained of do-not-touch raises the notion of untouchability. The Congress Party which has changed its election symbol several times, has now decided upon the hand—perhaps because of its multiplicity of meanings.*



one meaning is conveyed, namely  $\text{NaCl} = \text{common salt}$ .

Antithetically opposed to this is the emotive function which is to connote, to express subjective values or attitudes. Closely related to this is the poetic function which is to create message-objects that are the bearers of their own meaning. Aesthetic codes bring variables of meaning and connotative values to life, deliberately developing them. The famous Mona Lisa smile tantalises precisely because of its ambiguity or multiplicity of meaning. Other functions include: the *injunctive*, which is to elicit reaction, the *phatic* which is to accentuate contact more than to relay a message (e.g. lovers' talk, ritual exchanges), and the *metalinguistic* which is to refer one back to the code from which a given sign takes its meaning.

These functions can occur in the same message in varying proportions. Certainly they play a considerable role in all the arts. It is not difficult to see a metalinguistic function in the urinal, nor for that matter in much of formalist modern art. Medieval religious painting fulfills an injunctive function for poor sinners and believers, just as dada art or Italian futurist art provokes, shocks, calls to arms for the avant-garde. Clearly, even the referential function has its place in court art or historical painting, as does the phatic function in certain decorative art or sacred ritualistic art.

The various functions of communication, then, give rise to a vast range of codes. At this point, however, we should clarify just what is meant by 'sign', and what it has to do with 'code'. First of all, a sign is always marked by the intention of communicating something meaningful, although that intention may well be unconscious. On these grounds, natural indicators would be excluded such as deducing fire from smoke, or rain from clouds. Let us simplify by saying that a sign can be anything which by virtue of its peculiar properties (call it a *signifier*) evokes a mental image (call it a *signified*) of something other than itself.

How precise that evocation is depends on the type of coding involved. The code is the relation between the signifier and the signified. It is always conventional, being the result of agreement among those who use it. The more unanimous or inclusive the agreement, the more closed the code, the more singular and explicit the meaning conveyed by the sign. The looser the agreement, the less constraining the code, the more subjective, intuitive and varied interpretations can be.

In *Semiology* Pierre Guiraud discusses numerous types of





Photo credit: Pradip Saha

### *The Steps of Nalanda University*

*Steps are a structured pattern of order. They signify, in most tangible terms, the ascent of man. The flight of steps at one of India's most ancient and celebrated universities suggest the steps of learning towards illumination (bodhi).*



codes, showing just how predominant semiological phenomena are in man's life.<sup>2</sup> The most obvious ones besides actual language are the language substitutes. These include the alphabetic codes, such as jungle drums, morse, cryptographics and autonomous codes, such as passwords, pictograms, hieroglyphs and Chinese ideograms. These are precise codes evolved through a high degree of user agreement. Less obvious are the auxiliaries of language, which act as accompaniment, adding an expressive element. These would include codes of prosody, such as variations of pitch, intensity, intonation and even quantity of articulated speech, such as respectful silence or raised voice. Also included here would be kinesic codes, such as gestures and mimicry paralleling language, for instance, raised eyebrows, shrugging shoulders, and proxemic codes which are concerned with the distance separating people, for instance indicators of intimacy or status. Without context, these codes are by and large more polysemous.

Practical codes, on the other hand, such as highway signs, warning signals, air space and marine codes, battle orders and even the blind man's white stick are strictly monosemic in character, for a maximum efficiency of communication. Similarly, epistemological codes such as algebraic, geometric or chemical formulae are structured so as to minimise interference of subjective understanding. There are countless social codes ranging from subtle to explicit indicators of how society is organised. Included here would be insignias such as coats-of-arms, flags, totems, uniforms such as club, occupational, institutional uniforms, names, nicknames, shop signs, trade-marks, product packaging and protocols of politeness or insult. Also included would be make-up and hairstyles, especially in primitive societies, fashion, food and even cars and furniture, as Roland Barthes points out in *Mythologies*.<sup>3</sup>

In short, almost everything in the ordered life of man can signify something. Psychologist Carl Jung said, "The recognition of patterns of order affects human beings as meaning."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, signs, the conveyors of meaning, presuppose structure. Those structures may well be implicit. For example, mantic codes, as in the art of divination and communication with the gods, are codes of knowledge in which signs function as the indicators of a complex reality. Aesthetic codes too may be viewed as codes of knowledge involving the subjective impressions which reality makes upon the human spirit. They can represent the unknown and the beyond-logic through the concrete



experience of the senses. They can signify our desires by conjuring up imaginary scenes to compensate for the frustrations of the world. Guiraud states, "art enables us to signify ourselves by deciphering our psyche in terms of the order of nature."<sup>5</sup>

Let us zoom briefly into the aesthetic code. Visual signs within the aesthetic code are mainly iconic as opposed to arbitrary. Iconic signs evoke primarily an individual, specific object, which may secondarily evoke a generalising attitude. Iconic signs can be schematic, reduced to simplest outlines, pleromatic, rich in detail. They can be semantic by evoking images of definite objects, or asemantic by exalting stimulative factors over representative factors.

The intricacy of semantic structures in art is well exemplified by medieval art. It has often been maintained that medieval art was a language with a vocabulary of iconic and conventional signs bound by a distinct syntax. In *Arts and Signs*, Wallis points out that "The medieval work of art was a rich and complex poliphony. By means of a specific language it appealed not only to sight but also to memory and intellect, evoking complicated intellectual and emotional responses."<sup>6</sup> It was an art replete with iconic signs functioning as symbols so tightly fixed in their coding as to be almost like conventional signs, such as the nimbus designating 'saint'. Other symbols were shifting, so that a pearl could signify the Word of God, Christ, the Host, or the Kingdom of Heaven, depending on the context. In reverse fashion, Our Lady could be symbolised by a variety of iconic signs, such as a fiery shrub, a diamond, pearl, etc.

Medieval art also exploited the picture field, by ascribing meaning to signs according to their spatial or temporal placement. Another device commonly used was the semantic enclave, or inscriptions in painting. Some inscriptions fulfilled practical functions such as identification, recall of events or prefiguration. By far the most fascinating semantic enclaves have to do with the concept of word as imbued with meaning and capable of containing ultimate truths. For those who could read, these messages were esoteric. For those who couldn't read, they were a presentiment of something important and mysterious to be respected. The power of medieval painting cannot be dissociated from its semiotic structure. This is equally true for many of the oriental arts, such as classical Chinese theatre, Buddhist *thangka* painting, sacred Hindu dances and



Indonesian ritual music, to mention only a few.

The history of art, Wallis points out, can in fact be conceived of as the history of semantic structures.<sup>7</sup> We see how the complicated apparatus of medieval art disintegrated in the art of the Italian high renaissance, only to be resuscitated in the counter reformation and baroque periods, which built their own edifices of images and symbols. In the nineteenth century, the illustrative mode of romanticism gave way gradually to the naturalism of the 50s, the impressionism of the 70s and 80s. There was a renunciation of subject matter weighed down by tightly coded semantics, in favour of a more loosely shaped code around genre scenes and the phenomena of colour and sunlight. Late impressionism, fauvism, cubism, and the rapid sequence of other -isms quickly went from reduction to suppression to elimination of the semantic sign. That is not to say that sign disappeared. It is merely to say that its coding went from closed to open.

We see another type of transformation in the workings of the aesthetic code when iconic signs lose their iconic character and become asemantic ornamentation. For example, the likenesses of flowers or animals on vases, metal works or carpets have undergone progressive simplification by becoming pure geometrics. Chinese calligraphy is a particularly revealing example of the play between iconisation and de-iconisation. Chinese writing was originally pictographic, based on schematised iconic signs. These gradually became purely conventional, while keeping their picturesque and ornamental features. From the purely conventional, the iconic was again reinstated as the art of calligraphy. Calligraphy is rich with iconic associations, philosophical analogies and pure aesthetics. Calligraphic inscriptions can be integral parts of paintings, as well as paintings in their own right.

The aesthetic code then is immensely varied, both on the level of encoding (creation) and on the level of decoding (interpretation). Its functions of communication can be equally varied as we noted earlier. It is this omnifarious aspect of art which has distressed our investigations as anthropologist, art historian, philosopher, sociologist and historian of the avant-garde. Diversity or variance does not distress the semiologist.

By now it should be crystallising in our minds as to why semiology might be implicated in any search for a definition of art. In fact, semiology was a potential route at each of the cross-roads in



our investigations so far. Each discipline left us with certain 'buzz-words', certain snatches of thought which could have remote-controlled us directly to semiology. What we have gained in this delay, however, are the additional insights which we can now marshal to the service of "art considered as a semiotic fact". We have also gained a heightened awareness of the mine fields to avoid; the semiologist will try to till fresh ground.

**T**he anthropologist introduced us to structural analysis as a method of exploring the unconscious infrastructure of phenomena. Levi-Strauss' structural approach was actually modelled on that of structural linguistics. The anthropologist concluded that art is everything that humans call art. The mental activity involved in such an utterance is of course a linguistic one. It is the selection of one word from a body of possible words and applying it to a given concept. We shall give further thought to this word aspect of art. At the end of his tenure, the anthropologist found himself in a cul-de-sac with "meaning about meaning". We shall see how conveniently this translates into art as sign, the conveyor of meaning.

The history of the various arts can be conceived of as the history of semantic structures. We have just discussed how these structures, i.e. specific configurations of signs, have changed in the same organic patterns of rise and development as have the styles of art. We recognise the pendulum patterns in the two-way passage of iconic to conventional, desemantisation to semantisation, schematisation to pleromatisation, and back. What we will retain from the art historian's perspective is the notion of influence behind these processes of change. Influence bears a critical relationship with the origin of art, which in turn bears a critical relationship with the essence of art viewed in the semiological context.

The philosopher, by the self-imposed constraints of his own discipline, could not but come away empty-handed. Analytical propositions that attempt to formulate a criterion of meaningfulness in terms of empirical verifiability err in two ways. They constitute closed concepts which foreclose on the very conditions of creativity in the arts. With virtuous objectivity, they ensnare 'meaning' in a true/false polarity. Meaning in art, ultimately, can only be subjective. The open concepts and in particular the Wittgenstein-ian focus on



function, however, will find some echo in the semiological approach.

The sociologist's perspective led us to the concept of universal consensus, ironically paired with its improbability. To this, the avant-garde contributed the notion of struggle towards the improbable Utopia. From these we extracted art as an ideal and art as inherently conflictual. Both focus on the 'becoming' of art, where the preceding disciplines contemplated the 'being' of art. What, we ask, does mankind have in common that it could even hope for an eventual universal agreement? For the semiologist the answer clearly is communication and, underlying that, learning, which makes communication possible. The semiologist keeps his foot on both bases—being and becoming—for the dialectic between the two is of fundamental importance. We shall see that where sociologist and avant-garde share a forward, future-directed gaze, the semiologist is concerned with the *pas extant* in the present.

So far our discussion of the sign qualities of art has been largely anecdotal. The pertinent question now is: can we generalise and say that art, in its essence, is a sign or system of signs? For that we must take a more serious look at the theoretical foundations of semiology, and experiment with some of the analytical tools at its disposal.

John Locke introduced the term 'semiotics' in philosophy as early as the seventeenth century; but it was the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who founded semiology in its modern sense at the beginning of this century. Where the philosopher was asking "What is meaning?", the linguist asked, "How is meaning determined or encoded in a language? What are the laws governing change of meaning?" The work of Saussure, as well as that of his contemporaries Roman Jakobson in Russia and Charles Sanders Pierce in the United States, provided the conceptual framework for semiological research. Semiology enjoyed a tremendous surge of interest before and after World War II, attracting not only linguists but anthropologists, art theorists, psychologists and sociologists. Studies done by the Prague Linguistic Circle in the 30s and 50s, and later by Roland Barthes, are particularly interesting in the context of our inquiry into the nature of art.

Prior to Saussure the science of linguistics was mostly concerned with etymology, the historical development of language. Linguistics was seen as an evolution of pronunciation, spontaneous associations





Photo credit: Pradip Saha

### **The Lotus**

*The lotus is India's sacred flower, used from archaic times as the symbol of fertility, abundance, prosperity. It is the attribute both of the goddess Lakshmi and of the Sun god Surya, summing up the fertilising powers. It has now become the election symbol of the Bharatiya Janata Party, giving thus a new lease of life and different interpretation to an ancient 'sign'.*



and the workings of analogy—basically, a linguistics of the individual act viewed diachronically. Saussure took a dramatic departure from this approach by introducing synchronicity. He considered language as a system of signs complete at any given moment, such as to allow man to communicate. His approach here was structural, emerging from comparative grammar. That is, he considered language as a set of differences, etc. all being possibilities of differentiating meaning.

Fundamental to this shift from diachronic analysis to synchronic analysis, was Saussure's dichotomic concept of language/speech.<sup>8</sup> Out of the prevailing amorphous notion of language, he extracted a crucial distinction between system and act, that is, the act of speech made possible by the system of language. Language, he said, is a systematised set of conventions necessary to all communication. It is a collective contract, a repository of all the linguistic elements and their potentialities of combination. Saussure then opposed this purely abstract entity of language to the purely individual, concrete act of selection and actualisation which is speech. Speech comprises both a mental activity of selecting and combining language elements, and the psycho-physical activity of phonation. The separation of language and speech is *the* essential feature of linguistic analysis.

The corollary to this dichotomy is that there can be no language without speech, nor speech without language. Historically, speech precedes language; speech makes language evolve. Any speech, as soon as it is fully grasped as a process of communication, is instantly absorbed as part of the language. It is the repeated use of a sign in successive discourses and with an infinite diversity of various pronunciations, inflections, context and grammatical placement, that the sign grows to become a fine-honed element of language. Conversely, overuse or careless use of a sign can dull its differentiating edge, rendering it meaningless. In Saussure's words, language is a collective *summa* of individual imprints—the treasure deposited by the practise of speech. The two are bound in a genuinely dialectical relationship.

That relationship is of special interest to us for it provides a model for the 'becoming' of art. Barthes suggested that it is on the frontier between the two that creation has a chance to occur. Patterning ourselves on Saussure's language, we could say that the essence of art is the abstraction of the open-ended corpus of all things called art. The individual physical work of art compares with speech. It is created under the influence of the corpus, by way of rejection of



what is there or acceptance of it. In this way it both draws from the corpus and seeks integration into the corpus.

The language/speech dichotomy and the dynamics between the two go far beyond linguistics. In its most profound aspect it has to do with the universal structure of the human mind. There is no reality except when it is intelligible. Now we turn to some of the analytical concepts, the tools with which the semiologist explores his subject.

**S**emiological research aims to reconstitute the functioning of sign systems other than language, according to the structuralist process of linguistic analysis. This requires a more operational definition of sign. Saussure defined sign as the union of a signifier (Sier) and a signified (Sied), interdependent as the recto/verso of a sheet of paper.

Signification is a process, an act binding signifier and signified, producing the sign. The signifier constitutes the plane of expression or form. In visual language it is the material form of the thing, and in the spoken language it is the acoustic image. It is always material by virtue of sound or image. It is the 'word-ness' of tree or the 'picture' of tree, but again, not the tree itself. The signified constitutes the plane of content or substance. With respect to the degree of reality of the signified, it is essential to understand that the signified is not the thing, but a mental representation of the thing—a conceptual idea. One might say the tree-ness of the object tree.

The relation between a signifier and its signified can be arbitrary, i.e. non-analogical, or it can be motivated, i.e. analogical. There can be a coexistence of the analogical and the non-analogical, even within a single system. In the articulated language, for example, the word 'ox' is an arbitrary sign in that the sound 'o-x' bears no causal, visual or acoustic relation to the animal ox. That the sound 'o-x' should signify the concept ox is merely the result of convention or agreement among users. This is true for most words, onomatopoeias being obvious exceptions. Chinese ideograms, on the other hand, are signs which originated analogically and acquired arbitrary elements in the course of their evolution as a system.

Although the correlation signifier/signified clarifies the composition of sign, the production of meaning involves a double determination. The second half of this operation is something



Saussure called the value of the sign, that is, sign considered by way of context. The word 'agitated' for example derives its value from its coexistence with other words sharing the same general field of meaning, such as 'worried', 'tense', 'nervous' and so on. The precise meaning of 'agitated', therefore, is only truly fixed at the end of this double determination: value and signification.

Roman Jakobson, a Russian linguist contemporary with Saussure, said that the relationship between linguistic terms develops on two planes of mental activity. These are the paradigmatic plane and the syntagmatic plane. The paradigmatic plane is also referred to as the plane of associations, implying a kind of classification of terms in absentia. In order to utter a word, one must choose from the store of potential terms within a given associative field. These terms have one common and one variable element, as regards either their form (signifier) or their meaning (signified). For example, as discussed under the concept of value, 'worried' and 'agitated' share the same field of meaning. There is a similarity of form and global meaning, but where 'worried' evokes a more mental state, 'agitated' evokes a more physical one. Essentially, the mental activity of the systematic plane is the function of selection. Such a function clearly presupposes the existence of a system, a reservoir of possibilities which is none other than language as described by Saussure.

The mental activity of the syntagmatic plane, on the other hand, is the function of combination, of building sequences of the words selected. The 'spoken chain' is a union of words in praesentia and is necessarily linear in character. One does not write or speak in a simultaneous jumble. The ordered combination of chosen words is an actualisation of the possibilities offered by the language system; which brings us back to speech as described by Saussure.

Semiological analysis would attempt to distribute facts on each of these planes. That is, a sign system would be studied both in terms of its paradigmatic and its syntagmatic elements. However, this merely represents a first order of meaning, where other levels of meaning may also be subtended. Consequently, sign systems must also be analysed in terms of their denotation, connotation and metalanguage.

Every sign has a denotation, a reference or extension, which is the object to which it refers. It can also have a connotation, a sense or intension, which is a deeper and sometimes more veritable layer of meaning. Signs may mean more than they 'say', or they may even





*Tiger in the Moonlit Night. Painting by Jogen Chowdhury*



mean something totally different from what they 'say'. Breughel's "Slaughter of the Innocents" denoted the massacre of infants by Herod, but also connoted the cruelties of Spanish soldiers in the Netherlands. When said in anger "The door is there!" the denotative level of meaning is strictly secondary to the connotative meaning which is "Get out!" Not to mention the proverbial "No, no, no" which really means "Yes!"

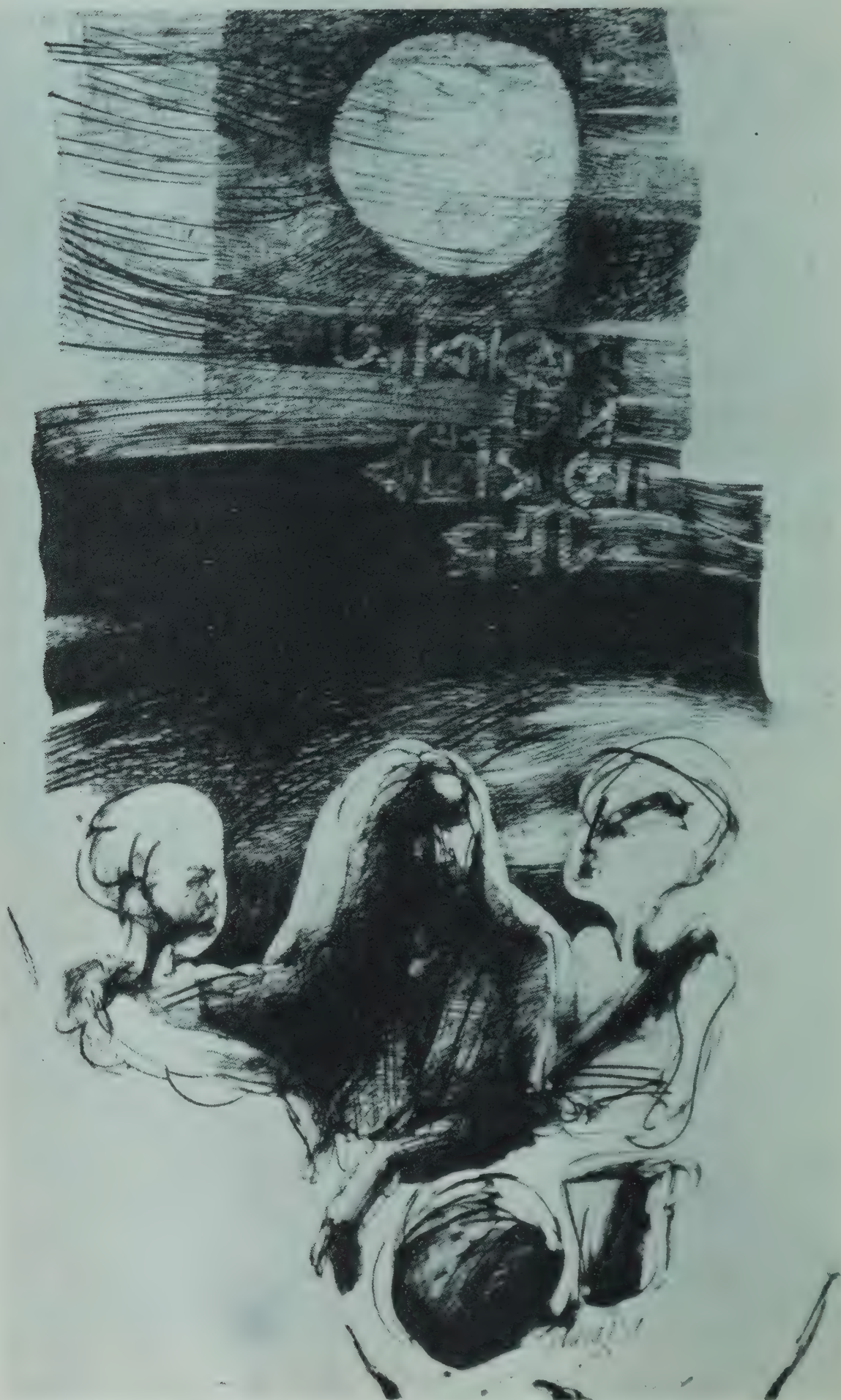
The signified of connotation are like fragments of ideology—general, global, diffuse. Metalanguage is usually a language of specialisation or terminology. One might say that the title of a work of art is a form of metalanguage, since it is a sign whose signified (i.e. the work of art) is itself a sign or system of signs.

In this context of stratified meanings, the figures of speech known as metaphor and metonym are of special interest. Metaphor, a phenomenon of the paradigmatic plane is the extension or transference of meaning based upon some similarities. To say "He's a lion!" is, in a way, denotatively nonsensical. Its intelligibility comes from the connoted meaning which is that he possesses the qualities of a lion, king among his species, courageous, vigorous. The metaphor can be seen as a vertical function in that it brings to mind a whole structure of underlying comparisons.

In metonym, a function of the syntagmatic plane, the name of one thing is used for that of another, of which it is an attribute, or with which it is associated. Like a synecdoche, it uses a part to express the whole. It can be seen as a horizontal function, a short-cut in linear discourse. To say "I drink a glass" is denotatively absurd. It is the mental addition of the word "wine" on the connotative level which gives the sentence its sense. Similarly, "Washington answered Moscow" is a short cut to mean "The leaders from Washington answered the leaders from Moscow".

This exhausts the main body of analytical concepts shared by Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva. There is, however, one weakness to the system in that it excludes the object, the real thing, from the consideration of sign. This becomes problematic especially where the real thing participates in the genesis of the sign, as in the case of a painting or a photograph that depicts a landscape, for example. Not only does the image evoke the idea of what is represented, but it is actually linked causally, existentially to the real thing. Barthes' solution to this dilemma is to translate every kind of sign into language so that language becomes the mediator. "To perceive what





*The Moon in the Plate. Drawing by Dhiraj Chowdhury, 1991*



a substance signifies is inevitably to fall back on the individuation of language.<sup>9</sup> The issue was more directly addressed, however, by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, sometimes referred to as the co-founder of semiology. In his *Collected Papers*, Peirce articulated a breakdown of sign which included the referent or real object. In Peirce's triadic theory, sign would comprise three aspects: (1) the representamen, corresponding to the visual or acoustic signifier, (2) the object, which is the new element, the referent, and (3) the interpretant, corresponding to the signified. More precisely, the sign is comprised of the relation of its three aspects to each other, the relationship with the referent being based on its existence. Each of the three aspects also has three relational options: (1) via resemblance (icon or image), (2) by causal linkage (index), or (3) by convention (symbol). Resemblance or icon implies a portrait or close representation, as for example, a figurative work of art. The causal link implies that the object is the cause of the sign: knocking is an index of someone at the door. Convention implies that the way the signifier relates to the object and to the signified is arbitrary. By way of example we might say that traditional perspective painting is both convention and resemblance because its goal is representational (icon) and its method is set down by the conventional rules of perspective. A photo is an icon and an index with respect to the object photographed.

How then are the analytical concepts thus far encountered put to use by the semiologist? In his *Elements of Semiology*, Barthes articulated the methodology whereby a sign system might be analysed. To analyse a given work of art as a sign system we would ask, "How does meaning get into the image?" On the level of a corpus of works we would ask "If art is a sign system, how does it function?" Neither question asks point blank "What is art?" Rather, there is a back door assumption that art is a sign or system of signs; and one proceeds to analyse it as such. The corpus we require must be varied enough to saturate a complete system of resemblances and differences. At the same time, it must be homogenous enough for comparison in time and substance. That is, it should be a synchronic set. We therefore select a variety of works executed in the same medium and preferably of similar genre. A corpus of works by Klee, Kandinsky, Mondrian and Klein will provide us with examples as



Photo credit: Pradip Saha



*The Hammer and Sickle*

*The Hammer and Sickle, the symbols of labour and farming, have become the trademark of communism. Over the years the Marxist Party in West Bengal has perfected the art of the wall, known popularly as 'walling'. The innovations of typography and graphics have an immediate political thrust. Visually, however, this photograph is arresting by the combination of the colours blood red and pitch black, fused with the typography and finally the crack in the wall—which might suggest a crack in the whole system.*



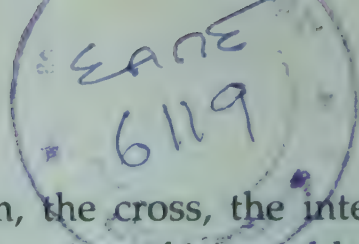
we move through Barthes' methodology.

One begins with an analysis of the syntagmatic systems constituting the corpus. Or more simply put, an isolation of the signs. As Barthes pointed out, it is language which divides reality, i.e. the continuous spectrum of colours is verbally reduced to a series of discontinuous terms.<sup>10</sup> While a language syntagm, let us say a sentence, is also a continuous chain, it is easier to divide because of the linear sequencing. Essentially each word can be subjected to the commutation test which allows one to spot by degrees the significant units or signs which together weave the syntagm.

In the case of a work of art, we are faced with a sort of reversed primal proposition. A work of art, we might say, is more like a restoration of some facet of the reality divided up by language. Every element or sign of a painting is bound into a unique and integral whole, defying the slightest change or disengagement of its constituents. Its very essence depends on the simultaneous eruption of its signs. Determining the limits of these signs is therefore a far more approximate and arbitrary operation than in the case of words. Furthermore, in the linguistic model, the signifiers are conveniently contiguous with their signifieds. Words simply mean what they mean, at least on the denotative level. In the pictorial sign on the other hand, the signifiers tend to be connected to their signifieds mainly by similarity. The pictorial sign is therefore not a stable unit of meaning but rather a shimmering polysemy. As Barthes points out "All images are polysemous; they imply underlying their signifiers a floating chain of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others."<sup>11</sup>

In the pictorial sign, the material properties of the signifier produce psycho-physical effects which invariably have some semiotic implications, independent even of the signs' referential or aesthetic function. The lines and colours of a picture signify something, diffuse though that something may be, as Kandinsky demonstrated with his absolute paintings. A colour patch, regardless of its shape, is capable of evoking certain images or stimulating different attitudes. The famous IKB, International Klein Blue, has clearly had its rivetting effect even on those unaware of the special metaphysical significance with which the artist imbued it. For Klein, this blue represented the infinite, the spirit, the void. In Mondrian's red-yellow-blue compositions, the intersecting black contours evoke both relational tensions and orderliness, quite apart from any personal symbolics





inspiring the artist. For Mondrian, the cross, the intersection of vertical and horizontal forces, was a sign of internal harmonies, a recognition of absolute spirit. These two examples underline both the semiotic power of pictorial signs and their inherent polysemy—the floating chain of signifieds.

Schapiro attributed semiotic potential to the properties of the picture field as well. That is, he identified differences in expressive quality between broad/narrow, upper/lower, left/right, central/peripheral, corners/rest of space. "The qualities of upper and lower are probably connected with our posture and relation to gravity and perhaps reinforced by our visual experience of earth and sky," he said.<sup>12</sup> Coming at the same idea from a slightly different angle, semiologist Jiri Veltrusky noted the semantic impact that colour can have on the pictorial plane<sup>13</sup>, i.e. impressions of advancing/receding or foreground/background with warm/cool or light/dark colours. The same is true for shapes submitting to the codes of linear and aerial perspective. Colours can trigger affective responses, i.e. calming celestial blues versus arousing blood reds. So too can lines of the jagged versus smooth, and textures of the rough versus limpid. The relationship of colour to shape is also an encoding for the viewer's eye. If, for example, red takes up a substantial contour of a figure, it acquires close connection with the object quality of that figure, a property. If, on the other hand, it takes up a smaller part of the total contour, it acquires a quality of light or colour value.

All the individual components of a painting become independent meanings codetermining the meaning of the painting as a whole through a complex interplay. That interplay is what we shall consider as the grammar of our pictorial syntagm.

The pictorial sign is not made up of a combinatory system of digital units as is the linguistic sign, nor does it operate with the dividing principle characteristic of language. The pictorial sign is wedded to an analogical mode which is inherently unified. Certainly, on one level, there can be no argument that the concept of resemblance intrinsic to art must include the realisation that similarity is inseparable from contrast: there can be no similarity without dissimilarity. It is the very basis of delineation, chiaroscuro, colour contrast, positive versus negative space and so forth. The issue therefore is more one of *emphasis*. The pictorial sign is ill-suited to the binary thinking behind a strictly oppositional type of analysis. Barthes himself made a small concession in that direction, by hinting



that semiology might eventually be looking at serial rather than oppositional paradigmatic relations.<sup>14</sup>

We can now look at the three main types of oppositions as set out by Barthes. Firstly, oppositions can be classified according to their relations with the whole system and that relation can be described as bilateral, multilateral, isolated or proportional. In Mondrian's *Horizontal Tree*, we can isolate parallel pairs of verticals in opposition to parallel pairs of horizontals, and say that these relate proportionally in that they are repeated throughout the painting. The resulting sense of uninterrupted horizontal expansion is what we could describe as the associative field shared by these oppositional elements.

The second type of opposition is the *privative*. Here the signifier of one term is characterised by the presence of a significant element or mark which is missing in the signifier of the other. The absence can be as significant as the presence: two circles on one figure where there are none on another can suffice to designate man and woman within the associative field of human. In Klee's *Plan for a Castle* we can consider the oppositions of closed geometric, regular shapes against meandering angular lines as privative. Both conceivably share some such global signified as 'the rational and irrational forces creating the world'.

The third type of oppositions are those that are classified according to their differentiating value. In art, whose life blood is polysemy, constant differentiating value plays little role. In Kandinsky's various *improvisations* we see the deliberate suppression of the signifieds. If we extract oppositions of radiant colours, we enjoy complete freedom of interpretation. Any associations are valid: Russian folk art, Russian icons, sunset over Moscow, landscape remnants, music, dancing, universal forces, cataclysms, whatever.

While oppositions can be useful in analysing a given work of art or a corpus of works, they cannot exhaust all the possibilities of meaning. Indeed, a rigorous categorisation of oppositions would even seem to subvert any such attempt. The looser approach, of looking at the associative field as serial, allows for greater synthesis of the component and global meanings of a painting. For example, from Klee's *Around the Fish* we could isolate one of several cryptographic elements. The small cross floating in the upper right hand corner is almost a metalanguage, in that its very presence casts inference on the context in which the other elements might be



considered. The fish is obviously not a mere still life. Nor is the sliver of moon merely a part of an evening landscape. There is a serial association which draws each sign into what Klee himself called a 'cosmic picture book,' a mystical event.

Even with the serial approach, however, there is no simple transitive function leading to meaning. The door always remains open to new associations and interpretations.

In short, the methodology of semiology can be a useful tool for the purposes of interpretation or classification of works of art. It cannot substitute for the experiencing of art; nor can it illuminate anything ontological about art. The theoretical foundations of semiology, however, may.

**W**e have already discussed how language is at the same time the product and instrument of speech. This notion was expanded with the cultural anthropologist's view that "Humanity is the product of its own total past history and activity and each individual is both the product and the support of a collective consciousness that defines a particular moment in the history of the human spirit."<sup>15</sup> Barthes makes this connection for us in *Elements of Semiology*: "The manifest affinity of the language according to Saussure and of Durkheim's conception of a collective consciousness independent of its individual manifestations has been emphasised very early on."<sup>16</sup>

Jung too postulated, in addition to the personal unconscious, a collective unconscious which he described as being common to all mankind, and originating in the inherited structure of the brain. "Consciousness," he said, "grows out of an unconscious psyche which is older than it and which goes on functioning together with it."<sup>17</sup> The individual psyche, like speech, he saw as being an endlessly varied recombination of age-old components. The collective unconscious, like language, he saw as being the ancestral heritage of possibilities of representation—universal, primordial ideas and images which he called archetypes. "Not only are archetypes impressions of ever-repeated typical experiences, they behave empirically like agents that tend towards the repetition of these same experiences."<sup>18</sup> Archetypes, he said, exercise a numinous or fascinating effect which impels us to action. Archetypes are commonly misunderstood as contents, signifieds. Jung stresses that they are not



determined as regards their content, but as regards their form (signifiers). Content only occurs at the moment of consciousness. The archetype, he stated, can be named and has an invariable nucleus of meaning, but always only in principle, never as regards its concrete manifestation.

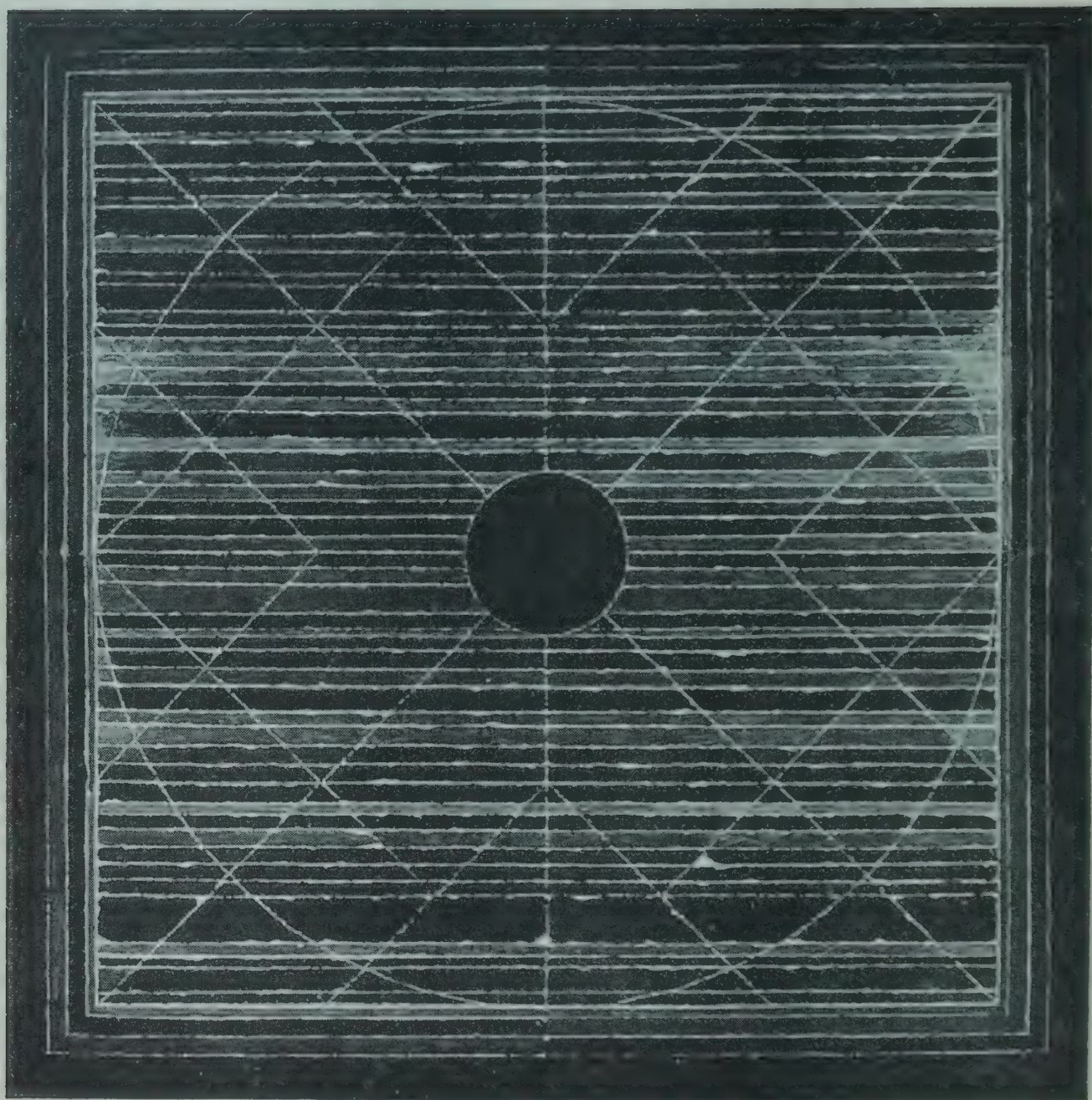
Reflecting on the linguistic nature of the unconscious, Lacan said: "It was certainly the Word that was in the beginning and we live in its creation but it is the action of our spirit that continues this creation by constantly renewing it."<sup>19</sup>

Here Lacan opens a slightly different issue: the origin of sign, the Word, as being coincidental with the origin of the universe as grasped by the human mind. The birth of language marked a crucial point in human development, rendering the universe significant all at once in an evolutionary leap. The birth of intelligence may have preceded the birth of language by some infinitesimal unit of evolution but, looking back through the thick layers of the past, we can say that they mark the same critical threshold. Producing a word, Lacan postulates, is a presence made of absence. The world of words creates the universe of things. Buddhist scriptures express a comparable idea in "The Void," which is to say there is no content, only form. Yet another way to frame this thought is to say: "Human intelligence cannot claim to grasp nature such as it is in itself; every statement about nature is in the same category as a representation of culture, which is a phenomenon of consciousness."<sup>20</sup> Form is brought to the plane of consciousness by linguistic and visual signs which are then realised as content.

It is surely from such connections that 'word' derives its esoteric value—the Logos, Christ symbol, the power of man as a spiritual being. Words were for a long time ascribed magical power based on this mysterious connection between a given word and the object denoted by it. Jakobson believed it was quite possible that sounds could convey certain meanings on the basis of their sensory qualities, due to some sort of synesthesia.<sup>21</sup> This is reminiscent of the sympathetic magic thought to animate the creation of visual signs (cave drawings) in paleolithic times. Indeed the suggestive powers of the image are such as to have led to idolatry in many religions, and by the same token to the censorship of religious images in Judaism and Islam.

Clearly, both linguistic and visual signs are implicated in the phenomenon of consciousness, which itself is implicated in the birth of homo sapiens. We cannot say at what exact point visual signs





*Germination: painting by Sayeed Haider Raza*



acquired the specialised 'poetic' function of communication in today's terms. What should be included in the 'arts' has always varied, and therefore identifying a point in time could only be an empty and arbitrary exercise.

**T**he inevitable nexus to be made as a result of this investigation is that art is a sign, drawing on what Barthes described as the collective field of imagination of the epoch. That is to say, drawing on the fully updated, cumulative, ancestral collective consciousness. Jung viewed the irruption of archetypal images from the unconscious into the realm of the consciousness, as the basis of religious experience and artistic creativity.

"Great art, has always derived its fruitfulness from myth, from the unconscious process of symbolisation which continues through the ages and, as the primordial manifestation of the human spirit, will continue to be the root of all creation in the future."<sup>22</sup>

Mukarovsky maintained that a work of art must be recognised as a special operation of sign mediating between the creator and his public.

"The artifact functions merely as an external signifier for which in the collective consciousness there is a corresponding signification. That signification is given by what is common to the subjective state of mind aroused in individuals of any particular community by the artifact."<sup>23</sup>

Let us now add Barthes' comment that we must enlarge the notion of language, especially from the semantic point of view: "Language is the totalising abstraction of the messages emitted and received."<sup>24</sup> We borrow one final 'thoughtlet' from Wallis concerning Chinese painting, and the curious formalisation of a process which underlies all aesthetic experience.

"Connoisseurs would sometimes make their own additions to the artists painting or inscription. These additions were treated as essential elements of the picture, as they testified



to the aesthetic responses on the part of spectators."<sup>25</sup>

We conclude with an outline of the semiological view on the process/essence of art. The artist perceives, communicates with, or receives stimuli from 'reality,' or the collective unconscious, which is the form reality takes for human beings. The artist encodes this in a work of art, which is an individual manifestation of his personal consciousness, comparable to an utterance or 'speech' in Saussure's terms. For signification to be complete, there must now be a second stage involving the viewer. The viewer too is receiving stimuli from his reality, a part of which is now the encoded unit. The viewer decodes the work of art in a fashion consistent with his own personal consciousness. That decoding is in the form primarily of an aesthetic judgement, and only secondarily as a consciously interpreted message.

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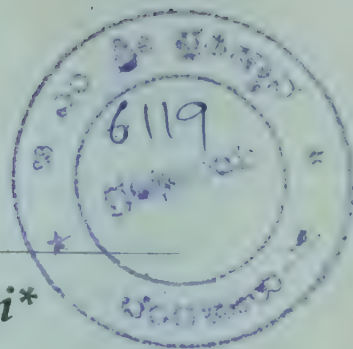
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اَللّٰهُمَّ صَلِّ وَسَلِّمْ عَلٰى اَزْوَاجِنَا







## *Shama-va-Parvanah in Ishq e-Haqiqi\**

**B**rought up in the highly developed and seasoned philosophical climate of the Graeco-Roman world of Zoroastrianism, of the Hebrew-Christian tradition and of the Buddhism of Balkh and Bukhara, Sufis readily and implicitly acknowledged spiritual affinities with and borrowings from one another's mystical traditions. That is not to say that all mystical systems of the world are the same in essence. Nor are goals, for that matter, the same even within the Sufi mystical tradition—much less within one tradition and another. Essence and goals are broad, friendly and generous terms and miss out on fine differences. The mysticism of Plotinus and Porphyry would not have come into being without Plato, nor Zen without Buddhism, nor Sufism without Islam. All mystical endeavour is an exploration into the mystery of Ultimate Reality (*Haqiqat*) and the human longing to have direct, personal experience of it. Each tradition rooted in its own spiritual and cultural environment, develops its own distinctive form, methods, goals and atmosphere and becomes, in time for the mystic concerned, a total way of life on earth—perhaps the hereafter as well.

Sufism is "the mystical dimension of Islam" with the *Ma'raj* of the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad as a central symbol of its visionary experience and the esoteric sections of the *Quran* and the *Hadith* as its early sources. Withal, Sufism is contained well within the framework of that religion's dogma, ritual and practice, enjoined by the Prophet upon himself and, without exception, upon all believers including mystics. Its historic beginnings and sources give Sufism its distinctive character and spirit, in some sense not easy to define.

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\* As the *parvanah* (moth) is consumed in the flame of the *shama* (candle) so is the Sufi consumed and his ego annihilated in the fires of Divine Love.



What I experienced of the spirit of a Zen monastery at Kamakura in Japan is decidedly different from what I experience at the *khanqah* of Nizam ud-Din Aulia in New Delhi. Existentially speaking, the unique form creates the unique essence difficult to describe, easier to sense and feel. Nonetheless, if different religions and religious philosophies ever find a meeting point it would be at a mystical level in a Zen monastery or a Sufi *khanqah* in a timeless, universal, spiritual experience transcending history, geography and culture.

When “hot for certainties”, in Meredith’s words, the poet or mystic or gnostic or lover steps into the region of creativity, he “[puts] off [his] shoes from off [his] feet” and approaches with awe, reverence and humility, “for the place whereon [he] standest is holy ground” (*Exodus*, 3:5). It is Muhiuddin Ibn ‘Arabi’s *‘Alam e-Mithal*, the subtle intermediary plane of vision and theophany where the spiritual is manifested in flashes of *ma’rifat*—intuitive insights in moments of God-given grace—and takes visible, sensible form or the form of dream or some archetypal symbol<sup>1</sup> for which the psyche of the mystic is already poised for recognition. At its highest, poetry is as much a visionary experience as mysticism. In Coleridge’s words “poetry is an inward beholding, symbolical of something . . . that already and forever exists than observing anything new”. The half-finished poem “Kubla Khan” remains a classic witness to this belief.

Sufism in the hands of poets who were also practising Sufis with sharpened mystical sensibility, who were also men of fervent imagination, well-versed in the learning, wisdom and sophisticated thinking of their day, classical or contemporary, was moulded into a product of unforeseen beauty and spiritual splendour.

Both individual Sufis and the Sufi *silsilah tariqahs* (ascetic orders) made a deep and lasting impact upon intellectual life, art, literature and language. At the *zawiyahs* and *khanqahs*, spiritual culture and rule of the contemplative life were accompanied not only by a faithful adherence to Islamic belief and practice but also by stress on character building, etiquette in speech and behaviour, hospitality to strangers and visiting Sufis and other courtesies of civilised living—all that can be summed up under the terms *akhlaq*, *adah* and *tehzeeb*. Sufis addressed themselves to the task of promoting literacy and shaping classical and regional languages for the spread of the Sufi message to the court, the market-square and the countryside in all parts of the extensive Islamic dominions. They developed the classical and elite languages such as Arabic, Persian, Turki, the Urdu



of Bahadur Shah Zafar's time (in India) for the formulation of the philosophical doctrines of *tasawwuf* (Sufi theology). Both Sufi and non-Sufi poets worked miracles in enriching the languages they used. They coined new combinations of usage as also employed existing vocabulary with unsuspected levels of meaning to expound states of the mystical mind directly experienced, in the first instance, without the aid of words. Phrases used for the communication of near-incomprehensible mystical truths became by implicit consent, standard terms for Sufi teaching and thought.

For instance, the single word *ishq* was enough for non-mystical love relationships. Sufis, however, felt the need to define the distinction between *ishq e-majazi* and *ishq-e-haqiqi* (human and divine love, respectively). The Sufi adventure into the concept of divine love led to the discovery that though divine love and human love are seemingly placed at opposite poles, they do, in fact, converge at a spiritual point. A human love relationship partakes as much of the inexplicable mystery as does divine love. The pun in "And Adam Knew Eve, his wife" means that to love is to know and to know is to love. For Sufis, love which is initially induced by beauty, seen or hidden, was a perfect form of knowing. One might well ask, is love without knowledge possible or knowledge without love? Love and knowledge go together in the mystical quest. The knowing and the loving are the basis of union and union disperses the vast loneliness and silence of the universe and gives meaning to life. Adam was no longer alone in the garden of Eden. So there existed no better way of knowing divine love than what experiences of earthly love could teach and no better recourse for communication than the language available to Sufis at the time. The diction used by Sufi poets, for example in the service of *ishq e-haqiqi*, was also taken over by poets of *ishq e-majazi*, and vice versa to the mutual benefit of both for extended interpretation of traditional terms. This, in the realm of language and literature alone, was a significant "renewal within tradition".

Given below are some examples of the traditional language of mystical love—*visal* (union of lovers), *hijr* (separation), *qarb* (nearness), *fana* (annihilation of the ego), *baqa* (an abiding in Allah), *nafs e-ammara* (passionate desires of the ego), *wajd* and *kaif* (ecstasy, trance, spiritual intoxication), *kashf* (unveiling of potential knowledge), *hijaab* (veil that conceals), *ma'rifat* (sudden flashes of intuitive insights and apprehension), *tajalli* (beatific vision, manifestation), *khilwat* (retreat,



withdrawal), *haal* and *maqam* (stations on the Sufi Path), *murraqqibah* (vigilance), and *simurgh* (a bird symbolic of identification of the physical and the spiritual in Faridud-Din Uttar's *Mautiq al-Tayr*, written in the twelfth century). Another common bird symbol is that of the netted bird. Might this not be a reference to the 70,000 veils that separate the soul from Ultimate Reality?

Here are a few selected terms from Maikash Akbarabadi's chapter on "Istalahaat" in *Masail Tasawwuf* in Urdu (Aligarh 1974)<sup>2</sup> used both for *ishq e-haqiqi* and *ishq e-majazi*—*khumar* and *masti* (inebriation and intoxication), *pir o-kharabat* (old man of the tavern), *badah-furosh* (wine seller), *dayr* (convent or house of retreat), *tajalli-va-hijaab* (a showing forth and a hidden state, respectively), *sanam* (the beloved), *arif e-kamil* (a learned man, a perfect gnostic) and *haqq-va-batil* (truth and its opposite), the camel, the tent and the caravanserai (journey symbols).

Here, also, are some terms and figures of speech selected at random used pre-eminently by non-Sufi love poets but when adopted by Sufis, they carry mystical suggestions—*mahboob* (the beloved), *butkadah* (temple of the beloved), garden, gardener, paradise, rose, thorn, nightingale, mirror, battlefield, dagger, pearl, star, *shama-va-parvanah* (candle and the moth), *pir o-mughan* (host of the tavern), *kharabat* (tavern), *saqi* (cup-bearer), *jam o-badah* (goblet of wine).

Sufi poets employed and further improved existing literary forms—the *masnavi*, *qasidah*, *mersiyah*, fable, anecdote, dialogue, *mulfuzaat* (discourses of Sufi sheikhs), *ghazal*, *rubai*, *qita*, as also poetic devices such as symbol, metaphor, melody, sound and rhythm patterns.

**T**he lexicon and imagery of *ishq* had a special appeal for the Persian-speaking Sufis of the love-intoxicated school of Abu Yazid Bistami of Khorasan. "I have drunk", he says, "the potion of wine, goblet after goblet. It is not exhausted and my thirst has not been slaked."

The most exalted of this school were Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922), Abu Said Abul Khair (967–1049), Ruzbehan Baqli of Shiraz (d. 1209) Najm ud-Din Kubra of Khiv (1145–1221), Jalal ud-Din Rumi of Qonya (1207–1273), and perhaps Hafiz (d. 1390). At least Hafiz "wrote in the tradition of Sufism", as also our eighteenth and nineteenth century Urdu poets like Mir Dard, some poetry of Ghalib,



and some of Bahadur Shah Zafar to name a few. They created the poetry of a vivid and passionate lyricism in their yearning for beauty, love and union with the Beloved or the poetry of contemplative peace or the poetry of ideas and of Sufi concepts. They sang their way into the hearts of men and women with the passion-fraught Sufi news of *ishq e-haqiqi*.

But the Sufi concept of human-divine love was too daring in respect of the transcendence and oneness of God. Mansur al-Hallaj, for one, paid for it with his life at the hands of the theologians and divines of Baghdad, the stronghold of *fiqh* and *Usool al-Din* (Islamic jurisprudence and theology). They were too obtuse to even dimly sense the mystical meaning of what seemed to them an arrogant assertion—*Ana al-Haqq* (I am Truth). Union in love for al-Hallaj was in some sense identification with the beloved. In *The Crucifixion of a Mystic*, referring to his dreadfully awaited martyrdom, al-Hallaj says:

I beseech thee, my Master, give me grace to be grateful for the happiness of thy giving, that thou didst hide from others what was unveiled to me, the raging fires of thy face. . . . My host with his own ruthless courtesy passed me this cup and bade me drink. I drank.

This was the cup of wine, the cup of love, the cup of crucifixion. In another context al-Hallaj says:

O Setter of Cycles and Shaper of Forms! . . . Thou wilt come shining to sight, when thou wilt, on whom Thou wilt and as thou wilt . . . in the image of the fairest form of Adam . . . the form which shall blazon forth the Word, the sole form gifted with knowledge and speech.

This is a reference to several Sufi doctrines—God or spirit as Creator of the awesome Word and the Word translated into form, the highest form manifested being that of man, who alone can blazon forth God's glory. This was another dangerous doctrine that without man God cannot reveal himself. Najm ud-Din Kubra subscribed to a similar belief. Still later Ibn 'Arabi was to give a magnificent expression to this kind of God-man relationship. Secondly al-Hallaj's passage stresses the fact that only in a God-given moment of grace does man become possessed of *ma'rifat* (intuitive knowledge) of the wonder and mystery of God's being.

Although Sufis lived by the motto "Die before ye die", they



were not dead to the world and its affairs. The voice of conscience would cry out against injustice and human pain. Rumi, Shabistari, Jami and others protested against the cruel martyrdom of Mansur al-Hallaj at the hands of the *maulanas* and doctors of Baghdad. Rumi defends al-Hallaj's assertion, *Ana al-Haqq*—"I am he", "I am God"—in the following lines in his *Diwan-e-Shams-e-Tabriz*:

*Ere there was a garden and vine and grape in the world  
Our soul was intoxicated with immortal wine,  
In the Baghdad of Eternity we proudly were,  
Proclaiming 'I am God'  
Before the tumult and mystery of Mansur.  
When e're an unjust judge controls the pen  
Some Mansur dies upon the gibbet then.*

Shabistari (d. 1320) in *Gulshan e-Raz* has this to say in defence of al-Hallaj:

*Come into the valley of peace, for straightaway  
The bush will say to you, 'Verily, I am Allah'  
The saying 'I am the Truth' was lawful for the bush.  
Why was it unlawful in the mouth of a good man?*

Few have experienced as deeply the amazing mystery of love—both human and divine—as did Jalal ud-Din Rumi (1207–1273) of Qonya, brilliant teacher, Sufi, poet, lover.<sup>3</sup> During a two to three years' entranced and glowing relationship with his Sufi guide, Shams e-Tabriz, the two together shut themselves up in the exercise and discipline of the contemplative life and also set forth some great Sufi truths. The most important among them was the doctrine relating to the difference between the phenomenal self and the Universal Self and the separation, at birth, of the former from the latter. The well-known verse from the *Quran* used by Sufis on the rosary "Verily we are from God and verily to God we are returning" re-iterates the human longing to be re-united with the Divine. (See Rumi's *Maqalaat*, a dialogue between Rumi, Shams and God). In Shams, Rumi had a glimpse of the Universal Self from which the individual is separated and to which he was repeatedly returning.

Due to severe opposition from Rumi's disciples and admirers, Shams, the wandering *darvesh* disappeared from Qonya in 1247 as



suddenly as he had entered Rumi's life. Rumi was disconsolate, bereft of the physical nearness of and spiritual kinship with Shams. The 2500 odes of the *Diwan e-Shams-e-Tabriz* and parts of *The Masnavi* give utterance to Rumi's exalted passion for his Sufi *pir* and vibrate with the lyrical poetry of ecstasy and exhilaration, of rapt communion between the two benighted souls as no other souls had ever known and that too often wordlessly; and also that of anguish and suspense for the welfare of the beloved teacher and of ardent waiting in his absence.

*The Masnavi* opens with the following lines:

*Listen to the reed, how it tells a tale,  
Complaining of separation.*

Rumi's search for Shams is a long spiritual journey in symbols. He surveys the Cross, the Temple, the Pagoda, the mountains of Herat, Qandahar and Mount Qaf. He then bends his reins to the Ka'bah (religion) and questions Ibn Sina (philosophy), but concludes he was not within Ibn Sina's range, nor was he in the Ka'bah.

*Then I gazed into my heart.  
There I saw him. He was nowhere else.*

Everything Rumi yearns for in his mystical state has its counterpart in himself. But in the extremity of grief and privation, Rumi saw Shams as a counterpart of his own soul. Gradually, the image of Shams is projected, in history, as Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Christ, Muhammad. Finally in a flash of spiritual illumination, both the person of Shams and his idealized image transcend all barriers and become a perfect reflection of the Divine Beloved. Rumi's love is transferred to the plane of "Ishq e-Haqiqi".

Selected readings follow to depict briefly this transformation.<sup>4</sup>

*O Shams e-Tabriz, I am so drunken in this world,  
That except of drunkenness and revelry I have no tale to tell.*

*I said, "I am naught in the world if you  
do not become my companion;  
I am without heart, without life, now  
remain as my heart's desire".*

*In joyous dance enter the garden of my mysteries,*



*My King, Shams al-Din, Commander of Gabriel,  
How happy is my soul and life, from you the brightness of my garden.*

*I am born in love now  
I am more than myself,  
I have been born twice  
Once in Shams, once in love.*

...

*I am a painter, a maker of pictures, every  
Moment I shape a beauteous form.  
And then in thy presence I melt them away.  
I call upon a hundred phantoms and endue  
Them with a spirit.  
When I behold thy phantom, I cast them in the fire.*

...

*Happy the moment when we were seated  
In the palace,  
Thou and I,  
With two forms . . . but with one soul  
Thou and I.*

*All the bright-plumed birds of heaven  
Will devour their hearts with envy.  
In the place where we shall laugh in such fashion,  
Thou and I.*

*Thou and I individuals no more  
Shall be mingled in ecstasy.  
Joyful and secure from foolish babble  
Thou and I.*

*This is the greatest wonder that thou and I  
Sitting here in the same nook,  
Are at this moment both in Iraq and Khorasan,  
Thou and I.*

*Through love the earthly body soared to the sky.  
The mountains began to dance and became nimble.  
Love inspired Mount Sinai, O lover, so that  
Sinai was made drunken,  
And Moses fell in a swoon.*

...

*Out of your kindly love, Shams, we have  
understood the atom.*

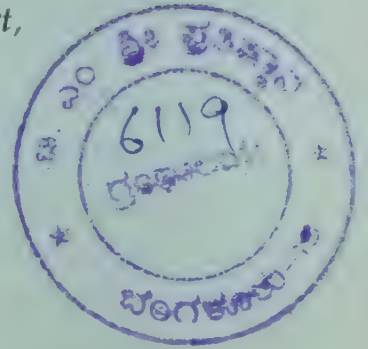


*We extended the boundary of meaning  
of each drop to your universal circumference.*

*O Shams, O Shams, watch over me, watch over me.  
Will it ever happen that one day, in soul and heart,  
I shall become one, I shall become one.*

...

*What is love  
Thou wilt know when thou becomest lost in me  
When the rose is gone and the garden faded,  
Thou wilt have no more  
The nightingale's story.  
Never did the dust of Fana gather in my robe,  
O spiritual beggar.  
In the rose garden of Baqa have I  
Plucked my flowers.*



This poet-Sufi was never of this world and his nature ever drew him to regions of the spirit. The identification of the soul and earthly self is expressed most beautifully in Farid ud-Din Attar's lines from *Mantiq al-Tayr*:

*And if they looked at both together, both  
Were the Simurgh, neither more nor less.  
This one was that and that one this: the like  
Of this hath no one heard in the world.*

**W**hether expressed in verse or prose, equally enthralling is the poetry and beauty of mystical doctrine, conceived in that intermediary "imaginal" world, which Ibn al-'Arabi<sup>5</sup> calls *Alam e-Mithal*. It is fascinating to see how this poetry of ideas is built up step by step into a full-fledged mystical concept and presented in the language of reasoned-out discourse. Few Sufi thinkers, it is averred by scholars and critics like Henry Corbin, A.A. Affifi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr,<sup>6</sup> have left such an imposing and convincing body of passionate mystical philosophy as Muhyiuddin Ibn 'Arabi, the Spanish-born Arab, mystic, poet, eclectic philosopher and man of spiritual stature and eminence.

I shall present briefly just one of Ibn al-'Arabi's very gripping doctrines, that of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Being) as related to the



longing of the Divine Names to be revealed from their eternal concealment.

Taking off from the *Hadis Qursi* which says "I was a hidden treasure and I yearned to be known, so I produced beings in order to be known of them, to become in them the object of my knowledge", Ibn al-'Arabi conceived his grand version of Creation which was, in effect, the nostalgia of the Divine Names and their yearning to be known. He clarifies an important point at the outset when he writes "the Divine Attributes are manifested in creation, but the Divine Essence does not enter into creation" (*Tarjuman al-Aswaq*, p. 90). In this way Ibn al-'Arabi reconciles the Transcendence and Oneness of the Godhead with His descent into the created universe. It must also be remembered that the reference here is not to the God of revealed religions or to that of a holy book. It is the Godhead itself in its essence and attributes.

With quotations from Henry Corbin's beautiful exposition, I give below this doctrine as briefly as I can in the form of a verse litany which I found easier to write than a straight prose statement. Verse overcomes the difficulty of formulating logical sequence and yet retains the logic.

*"I was a hidden treasure,  
I yearned to be known."*

*"The passionate sigh of primordial sadness",*

*"The anguish of unknownness",*

*The nostalgia of my Divine Names yearning to be known*

*Troubled the depths of my Divine Compassion.*

*So out of my transcendent aloneness,*

*"Alone with the alone"*

*I, the One, projected the Many.*

*I emancipated from eternal concealment*

*My Names and Attributes.*

*I sent them forth as missives of my unveiling,*

*"Revealing myself to myself."*

*Each of my "tajallies"*

*A joyous act of creation.*

*Each a mirror for a Divine Name.*

*But I am one*

*I stand apart in my infinite nature.*

*The many are not the whole of me.*

*Distinguish between them and me, and me and thee.*



Yet my Divine Names in sensible form  
 Are in nowise separate from me.  
 I encompass them,  
 I am not reduced to them.  
 Transcendent I, in the splendour of my infinity,  
 Transcendent in relation to my manifestations.  
 "By myself I see myself . . . know myself."  
 "Other than I cannot grasp me"  
 I remain whole  
 Yet I become part of my creative joy.



"I was a hidden treasure  
 I yearned to be known."

Suffering anguish in non-knowledge  
 "I produced beings to be known of them,  
 To become in them the object of my knowledge."  
 The knower and the known I.  
 My self-revealing is capable of every form.  
 I behold my image reflected in the mirror.  
 Each image cast in the mould of the recipient mirror.

In all Creations  
 Man alone can know me  
 Though only partially  
 He alone knows my Attributes  
 Which in my joy I gave him.  
 Behold! Like encounters like,  
 The like in me and thee know each other.  
 Whosoever knows me, howsoever partially,  
 Gives me being.  
 Behold! the perfect type  
 The universal man, the Adamic man  
 The twenty-seven prophets  
 From Adam to Muhammad  
 Each prophet a worthy recipient of a Divine Name.  
 Each a "bezel of wisdom".

Praise be! In knowing Him, I his creature (man)  
 Give Him Being.  
 He the One, the transcendent would remain concealed  
 Without me as I without him.

What is the goal of Sufi spirituality?  
 Union with that part of Him



*Which He in His mercy gave me,  
Which I recognise in myself.  
Other than that I cannot know.*

*I dare not seek identity with the Infinite  
I seek not annihilation in Him,  
But the beatitude of communion,  
Of knowing that Divine Name,  
Which He, in His love and mercy, gave me.*

*It is through that Divine Name  
That I commune with Him.  
The Great Beloved and He with me.  
More than that, other than that,  
I cannot know, cannot love.*

**D**oes this then not mean that the Godhead, because of His inexhaustible potential for Creation, will ever remain “a hidden treasure” and His Divine Names in a state of yearning to be known? No wonder, man in his deepest moments feels the nostalgia and *hasrat* (longing) inherent in the Universe for some thing that is forever naught because it is not known, and yet forever being joyfully manifested in acts of Creation, while the Essence remains exclusively and forever alone.

Ibn al-'Arabi's *Tarjuman Al-Ashwaq* (*Interpreter of Desires*) has the most exquisite poetry in verse form also. The 61 mystical odes of separation, desire and departure are written “in the language of human love”. Images of the camel, the pitched tents, the deserted encampment and place names like Arafat, Zamzam, Rama, Al-Hajir where messages were left for the desert winds to deliver to the beloved ones occur again and again and evoke poignant feelings of desolation, sadness and wistfulness.

I quote for illustration:

The raven of separation is only a camel with a swift wide-stepping pace. O driver of the reddish-white camels, do not hasten with them!  
But stop, for I am a cripple going after them.

Pleading again he says:

Stop the camels! . . . I beseech thee by God, by my passion, by my



anguish, O driver. O mouldering remains . . . at al-Uthayl! Where I played with friendly maidens! Do not wonder, . . . do not wonder, do not wonder at an Arab passionately fond of the coy beauties.

In his own commentary on the line "They journeyed continuously", Ibn al-'Arabi says:

Since the object sought is infinite, the return from it is also a journey towards it. There is no migration except from one Divine name to another.

Finally, I quote one short ode from *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, (p. 60) on the sorrows of parting:

1. *When they departed, endurance and patience departed. They departed, although they were dwelling in the core of my heart.*
2. *I asked them where the travellers rested at noon, and I was answered, "Their noon-day resting-place is where the shi'h and the ba'a trees diffuse a sweet scent."*
3. *Then I said to the wind, "Go and overtake them, for they are biding in the shade of the grove.*
4. *And bear to them a greeting from a sorrowful man in whose heart are sorrows because he is separated from his people."*

I look upon Ibn al-'Arabi's mystical philosophy and mystical verse as the ultimate in the poetry of personal visionary experiences of *ishq* and *ma'rifat* supported by a superb, intuitive imagination which can probe the Truth in all its beauty and paradox.

## References

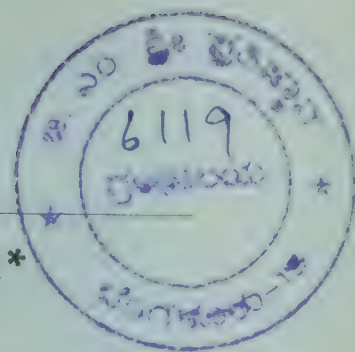
1. Such as Hazrat al-Khidr, the eternal contemporary guide on the spiritual path, who appears to Sufi seekers from nowhere and after counselling them disappears into thin air.
2. Hazrat Maikash Akbarabadi was an outstanding Urdu poet in the classical tradition. He was also a scholar of repute and a divine. Born in 1902 at Agra, where he died on 25 April, 1991, he remained the inspiration of such distinguished personalities as Jigar Muradabadi, Josh Malihabadi and, closer home, other Akbarabadis like Dilgeer, Simah and Makhmoor. A mystic whose family belonged to the *Qadiryah Sufi Silsilah Tariqah*, the great Maikash was a most discerning exponent of the concepts of *tasawwuf* and explains and presents these difficult philosophical doctrines in a clear and



most attractive Urdu style.

3. The following sources were helpful for this section:
  - (a) *Swaneh Maulvi Rum*, by Shamsul-Ulema Shibli Naumani (in Urdu), Lahore, 1909.
  - (b) Jalal ud-Din Rumi's *Masnawi* translated into English by R.A. Nicholson, Books I&II, London, 1960.
  - (c) Rumi's *Diwan-e-Shams-e-Tabriz*, translated into English by R.A. Nicholson.
  - (d) *Rumi, the Persian the Sufi*, by A. Reza Arasteh, first published in Iran, 1965.
4. Where not otherwise specified, the passages given below are from the *Diwan* or *Rumi, the Persian the Sufi*.
5. Also known as Ibn 'Arabi and Ibnul 'Arabi.
6. The following sources have been used for this section:
  - (a) *Tarjuman Al-Ashwaq* by Muhiyuddin Ibn al-'Arabi, translated into English by R.A. Nicholson, London, 1978.
  - (b) *Ibn 'Arabi's Journey to the Lord of Power*, Sheikh Muhiyuddin Ibn 'Arabi, East-West edition, 1981.
  - (c) *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* by Henri Corbin translated by Menheim from French into English, London, 1969.
  - (d) *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhiyuddin Ibnul 'Arabi* by A.A. Affifi, Cambridge, 1939.
  - (e) *Three Muslim Sages—Avicenna, Surawardi and Ibn 'Arabi* by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Harvard, 1964.





## *The Philosophy of Post-Modernism\**

**T**he philosophy of post-modernism is the most fashionable concept in the western world at the moment. It is also the most vague, and if you view it with deep suspicion and great scepticism, your instincts are very sound. I don't want to pin too much on a word or a label, but to speak about the basic reality of western life which stands at a great transitional point at this moment.

The essential character of the modern as against the post-modern is that the modern is a mixture of the old and the new. Everyone knows about the new, deriving from a scientific and an industrial civilisation, reflected above all in the dominance of the positivistic or scientific understanding of man and the universe. The other part of the modern is the western humanist tradition, which can be traced back to the ancient world and which has three elements. Our conception of reason and philosophy comes from the Greek world, the western conception of law comes from the Roman world, and the western religious tradition comes from the Hebraic world. The characteristic of the present situation at the end of the modern is that the old humanist tradition has now in effect disintegrated, and we are left with simply the industrial or the scientific outlook.

What are the serious implications of this development? In the west we had three ways of understanding man and the world. We had, if you like, three discourses: the metaphysical discourse of the ancient world, the theological discourse of the medieval world, and most recently in the last four centuries, the scientific or the positivist view of man. All these three ways of understanding the nature of man and the world are now in disintegration. The situation in the

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\* Revised version of lecture delivered at the India International Centre on 5 August, 1991.



west is that we have no clear way of understanding the nature of man, his position in the universe or the purpose of his life.

The end of the modern and the beginning of the post-modern is marked by the fact that we are lost. This isn't an original or a novel idea. It was already proposed by Husserl during the 1930s in his lecture, "The Crisis of Western Civilisation". There is also the interesting work of Ernst Cassirer whose last book of the 1940s was called *1*. Most recently MacIntyre in America has written a book called *After Virtue*, wherein he says in effect that in the west we have not only lost our morality but we have lost the notion of what morality is—we are completely lost.

At the end of the twentieth century this is the starting point of the post-modern era. The question which interests me is, where do we go from here? The starting point for answering that question is to examine it in further detail. We have lost the three fundamental assumptions on which the western tradition rested for the past two thousand years. You could call the first of these assumptions the mirror theory of knowledge. It was assumed from Plato onwards that there is an independent reality out there, and the task of all knowledge is simply to mirror it in some way. The first characteristic of twentieth century philosophers from Wittgenstein to Heidegger is the endeavour to get beyond a representative or mirror theory of the universe to an alternative—what you might call the symbolic theory of the nature of the relationship between thought and reality. There are many versions of this, but unfortunately there is as yet no agreed conception of symbolic meaning as against the representative. Above all, there is a suspicion that the end of the story is a sort of subjectivism or relativism which is disastrous.

The second foundation of the western humanist tradition for over two thousand years, now in disintegration, concerns moral and political thought, the sphere of values, or in one word, rationalism. Quite simply, rationalism is an extraordinary feature of the western traditions, and as it formed the background to the western ideologies of the nineteenth and the twentieth century. The starting point for western nationalism is simply the assumption that nothing has intrinsic value; it only acquires value when it is being processed against some criteria of human reason. Our ideologies, all assume or take for granted that there is some blueprint: some abstract set of norms against which the existing order can be tested; and unless the order corresponds to those norms, or is made to correspond to them,



then it has no value. The supreme instance of this rationalism is a most influential book on western liberalism, John Rawl's *Theory of Justice*. The striking thing about his work is that you begin by assuming that nothing that exists has any value. Instead you construct a criteria of rationality which acts as a basis for ethics. At long last there is increasing dissatisfaction with this rationalism; but it is not clear where you turn for an alternative, a foundation for ethics.

The third feature of the disintegration of humanism concerns really nothing less than the problem of personal identity. Let me come straight away to the phrase which focuses on the problem. We live in a culture in which the characteristic theme is what is called the decentering of a subject. The west has finally despaired and finally abandoned the great assumption about the nature of the self, which has dominated ideologies in the past two centuries. This is the assumption that there is a single unified monolithic self, that we have a sort of hard core or essence, or if you like, that we have a kind of secret identity which is at present being buried by the existing social order. This 'identity' can somehow be discovered if you change the social order; and if you can do that, you can become authentic, you can achieve a unified soul. Today if you look at the philosophy of Derrida and others, despite their different lines of approach, the common area of agreement is that there is no such monolithic self as has been assumed for the last couple of centuries. There is only a complex multiple self, and this is the ordinary sense of the concept of the decentered self.

The most profound revolution in twentieth century thought in the west is the reluctant rejection of the central assumption of western humanism over the last two thousand years. This assumption is so familiar that it is difficult to bring it into focus just because it is so obvious. This is the assumption that there is something very special about being a human being, that men have a very special position in the universe, that they are in fact the centre in some sense of the universe. The main theme of western thought in many ways over the past half-century, has been a sense of despair arising from the disintegration of that feeling of being special.

Sartre's first novel in the 1930s, *Nausea*, is the account of how one man comes to experience nausea because he gradually comes to feel there is not a special niche for him in the universe, that there is no guaranteed coincidence between thought and reality. The work of Heidegger is based on this disintegration of the feeling that man



occupies this special privileged place. Heidegger's characteristic phrase is that we are flung into being, and on this account he experiences angst. In the work of Camus, the encounter with the absurd as the central theme caused the decline of this anthropocentric assumption. Finally the best known perhaps is the work of Becket, the play *Waiting for Godot*, a story of how life appears once you have lost this specific specialness of human existence. The characteristic long speech of Lucky, the longest speech in *Waiting for Godot*, is not a speech at all but simply a series of incoherent remarks, a sort of babblery of the western position compressed into a page of stuttering utterances. This then is the end of the modern; and the note on which it ends is a note of disillusion:

**T**he question which arises concerns really the ambiguity of this disillusionment. Does the future hold for us what T.S. Eliot describes as the Wasteland, or what Max Weber describes as the disenchantment of the world and the new Ice Age? Or alternatively, is it possible to take a more positive view, to stand amongst the debris of the humanist tradition and take a more affirmative view? For the rest of my paper what I want to suggest is that it is possible to do so, and I want to draw your attention to the work of a major philosopher whose name is quite well known, whose works are not much read, and whose thought even when read doesn't seem to be very well understood. George Santayana died in 1952, and he differed from other twentieth century western philosophers initially in this simple respect that he clearly foresaw the disintegration of the humanist tradition and its implications; but he always remained affirmative or positive.

What was the secret? What interests me is the fact that Santayana doesn't bother with the three answers which most philosophers have come up with in the twentieth century. He doesn't bother with the first answer which comes from Kierkegaard, that what you need is a leap into faith. Secondly, he doesn't, like Arnold Toynbee, suggest that you turn your back on the west and head for the east. Toynbee was impressed by the fact that Rome had conquered the world politically and was then spiritually defeated by priests; and Toynbee thought that this would be the relation between the west and the east. Santayana doesn't move in this direction, and finally he doesn't really rest much weight on the important work which is now being



done here, in America and in Europe on the need for a new method in philosophy. There is work being done by Feyerabend and Rorty in Europe, Gadamer and Habermas and Professor Ashis Nandy and Professor Shah, on the critique of positivism, and the need to disengage the philosophic method from the positivist method.

Santayana feels all these things are enormously important, but they don't go far enough. In order to adopt this positive approach to the post-modern era you need something more. Although he doesn't use the term, it comes over best in a dramatic phrase from Nietzsche; "the transvaluation of values". Santayana says quite rightly that Nietzsche moved in the right direction, but he got the character of transvaluation wrong by creating the ideal of the superman. Santayana says, an adequate philosophy of the post-modern era is to move in a different direction towards a philosophy of modesty which we have lacked in the west ever since Plato. Now you might feel that this is like beginning with an elephant and ending up with an ant! The literature, culture, philosophy, the religion of every nation indicates that the main characteristic of human nature is egoism, and what is most alien to human intellectual activity is modesty.

What interests me about Santayana is that he succeeds in presenting the philosophic underpinnings of a philosophy of modesty, and they are three. The first is laughter, the second is materialism and the third is scepticism. Let me begin briefly with the first. To make laughter the basis of philosophy of course creates an immediate impression of triviality and even of perversity. That is unjustified, since the laughter Santayana has in mind is special laughter. Philosophic laughter serves three purposes. First of all that key anthropocentric assumption of the western tradition, that man is the centre of the universe is not a rational assumption. You cannot dislodge it by reason or argument but only by humour.

Consider, if a tortoise began to think, it would undoubtedly come to the conclusion that tortoises held a special position in the universe, and the only universe that was satisfactory was one which provided for the hopes and wishes of a tortoise. And if the tortoise found that the world wasn't like that, the tortoise would of course come up with a philosophy of the absurd and it would experience feelings of angst and nausea. We may find this amusing in the case of tortoises, but we don't find it amusing when human beings think in these terms. We admire their books and we run university courses on them.



Santayana's starting point is that laughter is needed in order to establish an adequate philosophic perspective to strike that keynote of modesty. This is not of course mocking laughter, not scornful laughter, not laughter which is based on indifference to human suffering. It is laughter in a sense at one's self and one's difficulty as a human being in accepting the limitations of human existence. It is laughter which reconciles and which penetrates self-importance and anthropocentrism. The third function of laughter is that it enables a human being to do the thing most painful; to contemplate the absurdity, the meaninglessness and the purposelessness of existence. Existence is best seen in many ways as a carnival, it cannot be explained by reason and it cannot be explained by love. It is explained more by playfulness and by the idea of celebration. The image of a carnival is the one which Santayana likes best of all.

I don't believe Santayana is entirely isolated here. He belongs to an important but neglected tradition in the west, which began in the ancient world, not with Plato, not with Socrates but with Aristophanes. This tradition in which laughter is important is resumed by Chaucer at the end of the Middle Ages, by Rabelais in the sixteenth century in France, by Cervantes in Spain in the seventeenth century, by Swift in England. Perhaps there is an echo of it in the present day in the latest little book by the American philosopher Richard called *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*.

Laughter of course is not in itself enough to underpin a philosophy of modesty. You need something else: materialism. I would sympathise if you said well, for heavens sake, that is probably the last thing we need in the west, more materialism! However, if you examine the problem, western culture is materialistic in a popular sense, but in a fundamental way it never has been genuinely materialistic. We have had immense difficulty in coming to terms with the simple fact of our physical embodiment; Bacon could not do it, and Plato could not do it. They thought of themselves as fundamentally spiritual beings with a body somehow clipped on.

Now of course in the modern world there is the materialist tradition of Marxism. Santayana is quite right in saying that the problem with Marxism was that it never fulfilled its claim to be materialistic. Marxism rapidly abandons materialism in favour of a radical humanistic dream revolution, liberation and so on.

Now what does an adequate materialist possibly look like? Santayana has in mind four characteristics which can be sketched



very briefly. If materialism is ever to become plausible it should avoid the error which is the downfall of materialism, and that is to assume that only matter is *real*. What true materialism or plausible materialism stresses, according to the ancient world of Lucretius, is not the unreality of the spirit, but the dependent character of spirit upon matter. The second characteristic of materialism, and the reason why it is important, is that materialism points to the essentially conditional character of all human experience. Now I want to stress that the theme in the twentieth century of relativism is a misunderstanding of the character of materialism. Materialism stresses that conditional experience is objective experience; but objectivity is mistakenly identified with universality. Experience can be objective without being universal.

The philosophy of the post-modern should be materialistic because it is only materialism which enables one to deal with the great illusion of the west in the past two centuries—the illusion that the human self is indeterminate, and therefore has limitless possibilities and thus, that the existing order, ideally needs removing, so that you have a *tabula rasa*. Materialism stresses by its very nature the determinacy of the self, and enables you to move from the destructive conception of liberty, still entertained in the west, to something much closer to the Indian conception of *karma*—which is roughly the direction in which Santayana is heading. The important thing about *karma* is that it is a theory of the determinate self, and rejects the notion of indeterminacy which characterises western radical thought.

Santayana quite rightly suggests that materialism is not a technical doctrine; materialism is a commonsense philosophy, intended to correspond with the ordinary facts of life—such as the fact that we are creatures with emotions and feelings. You cannot explain those things by identifying man as a purely spiritual or purely rational being. Or putting it slightly differently, self-consciousness is not self-knowledge. It is only when you bring in the materialist dimension that you recognise the broader, the wider levels of selfhood which lie below the level of conscious identity.

**F**inally, I come to scepticism as the third foundation of a philosophy of modesty. Now again, you might say, there is nothing new in this; the western tradition begins with scepti-



cism, with Socrates. Santayana says well yes, right, but it is not a genuinely sceptical tradition—although there has not been what he calls radical scepticism. If you have a second look at Socrates or Plato, what is called scepticism is really just a way of elevating one's own moral prejudices to the level of reality, and downgrading everyone else's to the level of appearance. Socrates' scepticism was just a form of personal conceit. It is not much better with Bacon who claims to adopt a method of universal scepticism, but never questions his own fundamental assumption, which is that the universe is itself rational. Santayana says that the western tradition is not genuinely a sceptical tradition; and what we need is a genuine scepticism which is a creative scepticism.

A creative scepticism is rather like the scepticism you might find at the beginning of the *Gita*. The creative scepticism is aimed at ordinary reality, as it is seen by human beings which is under the image of desire and will. In the words of the *Gita*, creative scepticism is intended to take the axe to the tree of desire. That scepticism serves as a door to reality. It is not a reality into which the self must merge or lose itself. Santayana insists on the objectivity of ideal reality which has been buried in the west for three or four centuries now. It has been assumed by our philosophers since the seventeenth century that the world of value, of beauty, of religion and of morality is simply a subjective one, covered by the three great disciplines of the twentieth century, psychology, sociology and economics. Through creative scepticism, Santayana wants to show that all these things rest on an ideal world. He would insist on the objectivity, the reality of the ideal; and in that sense he has sympathy with Plato. Once the sense of the ideal is recovered, creative scepticism restores the primacy of contemplative activity.

Briefly, how does all this apply to politics? Santayana's last work is a treatise on politics called *Dominations and Powers*. In the modern period, especially since the eighteenth century, the western tradition has completely marginalised the conception of power because the ideal society is always defined as one in which power has been eliminated. This is the view of Marxism, this is also the view of liberalism as voiced by someone like John Stuart Mill; and in the present day, it is the orthodoxy of someone like Habermas and those whom he influences: that the ideal society would be one of communicative rationality in which power would disappear.



Santayana feels that this is quite preposterous, a formula to Utopianism. The important thing that you have to grasp is that power is not a moral feature or an optional feature of existence. Power is an ontological category; it is the nature of existence itself. Power is simply the striving of every creature to maintain its own finite existence. Those who try to eliminate the notion of power, by following Marxist and other recommendations, have paid an awful price for doing so, and this has not been accidental. The only choice is between recognising power and then building on it, and then distinguishing it from domination. Michel Foucault is an interesting instance in as much that he has to stay with the ubiquity of power. Foucault does not know whether to be upset or to be pleased and he doesn't consequently realise that the important thing is to be neither. It is a question of recognising the powers inherent in an ontological category and you begin by accepting this.

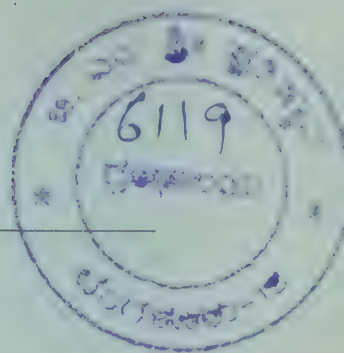
How then do you distinguish between power and domination? You need to go beyond power, Santayana says, to the notion of chivalry—and the notion of chivalry is intended in his view to replace the western liberal period of toleration since the time of Locke. Toleration is essentially putting up with other people, with the fact of diversity; it is, therefore, a patronising attitude. On the other hand, chivalry consists of actually taking for granted that it is perfectly natural for the other person to differ from you, even on the most fundamental questions and actually to affirm this diversity of existence.

Thirdly, another idea lacking in the modern western vocabulary, if one is to avoid disillusion, is piety. It must immediately be said here that Santayana does not mean the Christian form of piety; he means the pagan form of piety. Piety in the pagan sense is simply recognising, acknowledging and affirming the inevitable limitations of material existence. Piety consists of recognising the limitations to which existence is inherently subject and you must adopt that piety unless you are to end up with a purely subjective conception of domination which will enable you to find it everywhere and if you slip into that subjective concept of domination which has been an increasing tendency in the west then the world comes to seem a very cruel and a very awful place in which all human beings are doomed and a sort of nihilism emerges, a sort of despairing nihilism. Piety is the only antidote to that nihilism. The philosophy of post-modernism, as was



quite rightly said, is only one philosophy—there are others. This one is a philosophy of laughter and a philosophy of modesty; but it is a profoundly serious prospect—it is not intended as a joke. There are others and I would have no quarrel with them. But there is this to be said in its favour, that if you like travelling light and don't like carrying excessive intellectual baggage, then Santayana's philosophy has quite a lot going for it.





## *Returning India's Political Identity*

**A**s we dwell upon the 'state of the nation' four decades and more after 1947, some striking features of Indian society and polity present themselves to our view. Since the early 1980s we have witnessed a serious resurgence of communal conflict in the country. This resurgence has not only ushered a new regime of confrontation between Hindus and Muslims, but it has also poisoned relations between Hindus and Sikhs. Some of the states located in our north-western and north-eastern regions today harbour secessionist movements which threaten the very integrity of the Indian Union. Not only this, but the intensity of the conflict between different communities within Hindu society, too, appears to have attained alarming proportions in recent times.

It would, of course, be a serious mistake to look upon these disquieting developments as the only developments flowing from the liberation of India from British rule in 1947. In any review of the brief history of our Republic, we have several achievements in social, political and economic domains which need to be highlighted. Among the countries of the Third World, we alone have had an almost uninterrupted record of functioning as a liberal polity over the past four decades. Besides, we initiated programmes of social and economic transformation which have enhanced productivity in urban and in rural society. At the same time, these programmes have brought into existence a new middle class whose skills and resources—if properly organised—can provide the basis of modernity for our society. Indeed, it would be legitimate to suggest that many of our problems stem from the successes rather than the failures of the social engineering that was initiated earlier in the century. However, it would be futile to deny that forty years after the establishment of our Republic, there is such a serious disquiet in the

entire country, that it necessitates not only a critical review of our post 1947 performance, but also calls for novel solutions to the diverse problems which engulf our polity.

It is important to remember, however, that this turbulence is by no means confined to India. The changes which have transformed socialist societies in the world in recent years immediately come to mind in this context. What is seldom remembered is the fact that in capitalist societies, too, there is currently a great measure of turbulence and unrest. Indeed, as we approach a new millennium in the history of humankind, the available theories of social action—whether they rest upon liberal or upon radical worldviews—seem to be wholly inadequate to the challenges faced by humanity.

In view of the seriousness of the problems confronting humanity, there have been a number of prescriptions voiced by various political and scholarly fora. Perhaps the most daring prescription was Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's reflections in July 1986 upon the likely and desirable future of humankind. The prognosis voiced by Gorbachev more than five years ago can be profitably recapitulated today. Our increasing sophistication in technology and enhanced capacity to generate wealth, the Russian leader argued, makes nonsense of conflict between ideologies and nations, big or small. What is relevant today are economies of large scale, which accommodate within their ample space regional and local communities. Such accommodation of small and middle sized polities within a massive economic over-structure—as is true for the emerging European Economic Community—represents a significant trend of our times. The possible liberalisation of the Soviet Union and the increasing autonomy of its constituent Republics points to an alternate trend in the contemporary world.

**O**ur brief review of the disquiet of our times, which affects the world as a whole, no less than it affects India, provides an appropriate backdrop to an examination of the problems which beset us at present. Yet before we embark upon such a project, it is necessary to identify and define our sense of our past. This is so because we can build only upon what already exists. This process of locating what already exists, more or less, and then dwelling upon the possibilities of praxis, speaks of a combination of reflection and action which represents the highest tradition of social activism.



To achieve all these we have to come to terms with a concept which is essential to the creation of a liberal and durable political order in India, resting upon expanding horizons of wealth generation and also upon social equity in the distribution of the wealth generated between different individuals, classes and communities.

I refer here to the term "civilisation". What does this term mean? A civilisation is a major segment of human society, held together by mechanisms of generating wealth, distinctive social and political institutions, and a well articulated corpus of moral values.

The civilisation of India rests upon peasant sustained agriculture as the principal basis of wealth generation. It has distinctive social and political institutions, about which we shall dwell upon later. And it also rests upon a plurality of religious and moral systems which have interacted with each other over the centuries to create a distinctive texture of values, wherein different visions of the "good life" heighten their self-awareness through the contemplation of the "other".

In delineating the character of Indian civilisation, we need to dwell a little more upon its social and political texture and the values which informed its social constituents in order to grapple with the issues which we propose to raise here. At the outset, it is essential to say something about the moral values which informed our forbears in the past. Perhaps the most effective way of understanding the moral texture of our society is to contrast it with spiritual and ethical worlds other than our own.

As is well known, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are conventionally described as semitic moral systems. Such systems have a clear-cut definition of a social community or a brotherhood, on the one hand, and that of a sacred text—the Torah, the Bible or the Quran—on the other. Both the social and ideological parameters of semitic religious systems, therefore, are well defined and firmly set on the ground. In contrast to semitic orders, what we have (since the nineteenth century) defined as Hinduism, has a pluralistic and hierarchical social structure and a diversity of texts from which spiritual wisdom and moral poise can be gleaned. In its social manifestation, the semitic world is a tight world, conceptually speaking, and it does not readily encourage the articulation of distinctive or dissident voices. What is true for ideas is also true for social structure. Here it is important to remember that even in theory, quite apart from practice, Hindu society is divided into four



hierarchical *varnas*. Within Hindu society the individual is organised in social groups, or *jatis*, which as a matter of principle are placed in a vertical hierarchy, instead of being accorded equality in a homogenous system. The principle of hierarchy and the openness of its ideological texture can, therefore, be regarded as basic traits of Hindu society; and these distinctive traits enabled it to co-exist with a variety of religious visions over the centuries.

**T**he colonial interlude of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought about some dramatic changes within Indian society. These changes are manifested as much in state formation and economic reordering as in the generation of new values within Indian society. This is not the place to dwell, at any great length, upon these changes; beyond referring to the links of subordination which the Colonial State established with Great Britain in its economic, no less than in its social and political functioning. What is of special relevance in the present context is the creation of a new intelligentsia in India, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, which absorbed the notion of nationalism—among other things—and, in due course, sought to reshape the destiny of India in the light of this notion.

At this juncture, it is necessary to dwell a while upon contemporary developments within Europe, if we are to properly gauge the implications of nationalist discourse for India. The Great Revolution which transformed French society in 1789, is universally regarded as a landmark in European history, since it disseminated the ideology of nationalism among the people of Europe. As a result of this, linguistic and cultural communities located within the empires of Europe or Asia Minor—the Austro-Hungarian, the Tsarist or the Ottoman Empire—sought to fashion for themselves autonomous modes of political existence in the form of sovereign nation states. Throughout the nineteenth century, therefore, such linguistic and cultural communities fought their imperial masters with the intention of gaining independence for themselves. At the same time, homogenous linguistic communities, which were broken up as components of different imperial systems—the example of German and Italian linguistic groups is relevant here—came together in the form of new nation states resting upon cultural and linguistic cohesion and uniformity.



The ideology of nationalism, when it reached out to the westernised intelligentsia of India in the nineteenth century, reflected the aspirations and the historical experience of distinctive cultural and linguistic communities in Europe, as they moved towards political autonomy and distinctive statehood. Since the Indian intelligentsia was located in a polity which was controlled by Great Britain, it seized upon the ideology of nationalism as the ideological instrument of its liberation from alien rule. However, there was no critical self-examination within Indian society, at this juncture, regarding its cultural and linguistic diversity or regarding the character of Indian social formations. Instead, the intelligentsia, which dreamt of the liberation of its country from British rule in the first instance and communicated this desire for independence to the popular classes through towering leaders like Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, also visualised the creation of a powerful nation state in South Asia. Once the task of liberation from the foreign yoke was over, this nation state would embark upon the serious business of stimulating the productive capacities and the cultural creativity of the common folk.

The tension between the concrete historical form of nationalism in Europe and the manner in which the nationalist intelligentsia sought to forge distinctive linguistic and cultural groups, located within an over-arching civilisation, into nationhood in India, was a tension which was impossible to altogether dismiss even prior to 1947. Indeed, those leaders of the liberation movement, prominent among them being Mahatma Gandhi, who had a subtle appreciation of the unity and diversity that characterised Indian civilisation, articulated a vision of free India. This vision accounted for India's social fabric and, therefore, advocated the creation of a decentralised political structure within the country. Yet even the Mahatma looked upon India as a nation in the making, just as he talked of nationhood as the legitimate objective of our struggle for freedom. On the other hand, there were a number of political leaders who would have nothing to do with the formal and informal constitution, resting upon a decentralised and tiered structure of regional, local and village communities, advocated by the Mahatma. Instead, such leaders, even as they fought the British, looked much more to a unitary and powerful nation state as the legitimate objective of the liberation movement within the country.



Whatever be the validity of the Gandhian prescription of a decentralised Constitution for India, the circumstances associated with the overthrow of British rule in 1947 rendered such a notion wholly ineffective. In the first instance, a large segment of British India, inhabited by those who subscribed to the worldview of Islam, was shaped into an autonomous polity called Pakistan. Over and above this, it is also important to remember—something which we take for granted—that the integration of the princely states, too, posed a very serious challenge to the Indian leaders. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to assume that the erstwhile princely states were bound to fall into the lap of the Government of India once the British left South Asia. But to contemporary observers, it was by no means certain that the princely order would be drawn irresistibly into territorial union with a free India. Perhaps the formidable statecraft of Sardar Patel makes this integration appear, in retrospect, an easier business than was true in reality.

Our delineation of the climate of uncertainty in which the Constitution of India was framed by men of goodwill, wisdom and foresight, goes a long way towards explaining the character of the prescriptive design in politics which we adopted in 1950. There was, among the founding fathers of the Constitution, a fear of centrifugal tendencies on the part of the constituents of the Indian Union which found expression in a constitutional design that was much more unitary than it was federal in texture. Indeed, a striking feature of the Constitution was that, to start with, it did not recognise the principle of linguistic cohesion in demarcating the states of the Indian Union, even though the Congress Party had accepted this principle as the only democratically legitimate way of holding together the people of India in a single polity. Indeed, so ill-conceived was the structure of the Constitution, in this particular regard, that barely half-a-dozen years after it had been adopted, the territorial map of the Indian Union had to be redrawn by a States' Reorganisation Commission, on the principle that each viable linguistic community of India had to be located in a distinct state of the Union.

It needs to be stressed, however, that not only the written but also the 'unwritten' Constitution of India, failed to provide adequate space for the truly epic range of social diversity which characterised society as a whole. We refer here to the wide range of issues, collectively falling under the rubric of 'Centre-State' relationships, in



the vocabulary of Indian politics. The fact that the Congress Party ruled in New Delhi, as well as in the state capitals, for approximately two decades after 1947, prevented matters from coming to a head initially. This was so because many points of friction between New Delhi and the state capitals, at this juncture, were resolved through discussion and manoeuvre within the ruling party, rather than through a formal dialogue between governments. But within the Congress, too, there was an unmistakable tendency—which increased with the passage of time—to place upon the Chief Ministers of different states of the Indian Union, burdens and responsibilities which were not backed by either resources or the freedom to embark upon their own initiatives. The tensions, implicit in relations between the Centre and the states till the 1960s, erupted into the open with the passage of time.

Three factors were responsible for a sharpening of these tensions. In the first instance, as the urban and rural economy of India ripened, different regions of the country attained a level of maturity which called for initiatives in resource mobilisation, planning and decision making at the state level. Next, as already suggested, the dominance of a single party over the levers of power in New Delhi and in the state capitals broke down in the 1960s. As a result of this breakdown, tensions in relations between the Centre and the states, which had hitherto been confined to debate and discussion within a party, i.e. the Congress, now erupted into the public domain. Finally, it has to be recognised that some of the states of the Indian Union possessed distinctive social and religious identities—the case of Punjab or of Kashmir is relevant here—and these distinctive identities conferred upon their subjects increasing restlessness over time.

A brief essay does not offer us the space to recount, in any detail, the concrete tensions which characterise relations between the Government in New Delhi and the Governments located within the states of the Indian Union. It is sufficient to mention that tensions in relations between the former and the latter are manifested in a variety of forms in contemporary politics. In the case of some of the states of the Indian Union, like Punjab or Kashmir or Assam, differences have erupted into movements of secession which need to be handled with a sensitive mix of firmness and openness at one and the same time. But it is important to remember that the contemporary disquiet is by no means confined to the latter three states. All over the

country, irrespective of the political complexion of the Governments in various state capitals, there is a feeling abroad that social, political and economic decision making has to be much more equitably parcelled out to the States than is true hitherto. This sentiment is as powerfully lodged in the domain of the economy as it is in the domain of politics and culture. Indeed, with the market-friendly changes accruing from recent shifts in the economic policy, it has become all the more necessary that the devolution of power from the Centre to the states be accomplished at a fairly rapid pace in the years to come. For if the economic transformation being wrought by the Government of India is successfully accomplished, then the market—over and above culture—will become a powerful factor in holding together social classes and regional communities with markedly different cultural characteristics.

Yet the crystallisation of a new climate of politics and of the economic order in India calls for much more than a mere adjustment to market forces and novel economic reality. It also calls for a critical examination of the nature of our society and the modern forms of political existence most appropriate to our historical character.

At the commencement of this essay, we have attempted to delineate the character of India as one of the major world civilisations, resting upon substantial linguistic and cultural communities which elsewhere constitute nation states. In view of this, the attempt to define political modernity in India within the constricted space of a nation state is an attempt that seems futile and dangerous in equal proportions. "Feel the grain of the wood before you build anything out of it," stated a Japanese master-carpenter. We, too, should apply this principle to our endeavour to create a new state in our midst. By the same measure, we should recognise our civilisational character and draw it fully into our endeavour to create a modern state in our midst. The strength of such a "civilisation state" would lie in its ability to draw into creative unity the regional constituents of Indian society without creating tension and conflict in our political life.



## *Protest: Non-Violence, Persuasion and Coercion*

**I**n India we seem to have reached the limits of protest. Twenty passengers are dragged out of a bus in Punjab and slaughtered. Women, children and the aged are not spared. Two days later a *bandh* (general strike) is called in Delhi to protest against it. Buses cannot ply, educational institutions are forced to close, shop-keepers pull down their shutters, the government barely functions. A citizens' meeting to chalk out a programme to help the government to put a stop to such happenings rarely takes place. Those who plan the protest never think of organising relief to assist the victims of such tragedies. The example I have chosen is serious enough to warrant civil protest if it were to lead to constructive action. But protest also occurs over trifles. A Congress Minister calls a section of the opposition anti-national and the working of Parliament is obstructed for several days. The opposition party could have returned the compliment by declaring that the Congress party had sold the country in the Bofors deal. The matter was hardly worth fifteen minutes of the Parliament's valuable time.

Civil protest is a powerful and tricky weapon; we have made a mockery of it. One aspect of the on-going rhetoric is sheer hypocrisy. All political parties indulge in protest and take shelter behind the name of Gandhi. "The protest will be peaceful, non-violent," they proclaim. None of the precautions necessary before a non-violent protest is launched is thought of by the current advocates. However, I propose to focus on the moral justification of breaking the law even if it is intended to be non-violent. This will require us to distinguish between non-violence, persuasion and coercion. Gandhi has made a number of statements about non-violence and some of them contradict others. I propose to pick out a few of his important teachings and to discuss them in the light of recent enquiries initiated by John Rawls. It is not my intention to find a coherent theory of non-violence in



Drawing by Dhiraj Chowdhury



Gandhi's works.

It is a common assumption of Gandhi and Rawls that the function of civil protest is to rouse the conscience of the people and of those who govern to change some law or the other which is unjust. It is further assumed that such a change can be brought about, and indeed can only be brought about, if the protest is non-violent. If the protesters are violent the reaction of the state will be to counter it, leading to added violence. The appeal to conscience will be lost. Thus Gandhi said that he "sought entirely to blunt the tyrant's sword, not by putting up against it a sharper edged weapon . . . (but) resistance of the soul which would elude him. It would puzzle him and at least compel recognition which would . . . (ultimately) uplift him."<sup>1</sup> My contention is that it is a mistake to believe that *effective*, and I emphasise the word *effective*, protest can ever be totally non-violent. The issue is, how much violence is justifiable and under what circumstances?

What Gandhi and Rawls seem to ignore is that in the final analysis the state rests on the political and economic dominance of some group or the other. Vested interests develop and stand in the way of recognising the truth simply on the persuasive powers of reason. At least some slight degree of coercion is required to penetrate the barrier of prejudice.

Before we go further it is necessary to get one hurdle out of the way. When Rawls discusses civil disobedience he makes it clear that it can be used in a democratic society. Sometimes he refers to this type of society as a "nearly just" society. He does not define what he means by a "nearly just" society. For him the background is the USA and many would contend that it is far from being a "nearly just" society. However, the contrast in his mind is with dictatorships. In these societies the people at large do not share with the rulers the concept of justice on which the society functions. To rebel against the state and to use violence to overthrow it is in order, both for Rawls and Gandhi. The latter says clearly that violence is not the worst of evils. "It is a sin to sit supine, and for fear of imaginary anarchy or worse" accept a make-shift peace. And again, "where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the militants of the Kashmir valley have a case. Their argument is that acceptance of the Indian system was provisional and subject to ratification by a plebiscite which has never taken place, whatever the grounds the Indian government gives. To ask them to



eschew violence is irrelevant. For the majority of us who subscribe to the ideals prescribed in the Constitution, civil protest is important.

In the initial stages of non-cooperation in South Africa, Gandhi took the line that picketing is unjustified. Volunteers of the movement were to urge persons wanting to enter government buildings or offices not to do so. They could distribute literature. There was to be no physical obstruction since that would amount to violence. Later in India, Gandhi would inform the government in advance of his intention to break the law and the government could take pre-emptive action to thwart the non-violent protest. If this were done, the public at large does not even get to know that there is a serious injustice prevalent in their society which some conscientious persons are trying to remove. This point is well brought out by Bertrand Russell when he and others were involved with the Committee for Nuclear Disarmament in 1961. When he and other members of the Committee broke the law, they were hauled up and convicted by the court. Despite his age, he tells us that he wanted to be sentenced to imprisonment, though not for long! A sentence would give the movement publicity. He writes, "TV and press comments, pictures of demonstrations, jail sentences appeared in countries throughout the world and had an excellent effect in setting people thinking about what we were doing and why."<sup>3</sup> But he also tells us that once a confrontation between protesters and the authorities takes place the danger of violence arises. However, till this stage we can say that there has only been persuasion.

In view of the danger of violence, it has been argued that civil protest should be undertaken as a last resort, after all available avenues of redress have been exhausted. Is this feasible in all cases and is it morally correct? Cases have to be considered on merit. The student protest in India against reservation in August 1990 started immediately after the then Prime Minister Mr. V.P. Singh announced his decision to implement the Mandal Commission's Report. By then it was not even made clear what aspects of the Mandal recommendations had been accepted. Here was a clear case in which an appeal to the judiciary could and should have been made before organising civil protest. As it happened a reference was made to the Supreme Court and a stay order was obtained on the 1st of October, but by that time many young lives had been lost through violence and self-immolation and public property worth lakhs had been destroyed. The implementation of reservations would have taken



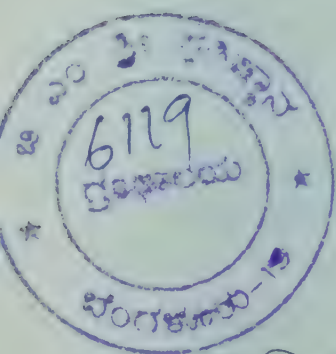
time and it was authoritatively estimated that it would take at least thirty years before the lower castes became a threat to the upper castes.

However, this may not apply in a case like conscription when the government may apply draft rules for a war with little or no notice, as in the case of the US war against Vietnam.

The question still remains as to whether a decision of the highest judicial authority will necessarily settle the issue? May there not remain a moral question as to whether the law itself is fair or just? Just one such issue has been before us in respect of the Shah Bano case. In this case, the Supreme Court of India ruled that under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, Section 125, Shah Bano, a divorced Muslim woman, was entitled to maintenance. On the so-called principle of non-interference in Muslim Personal Law, the Rajiv Gandhi government enacted the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights in Divorce) Act, whereby Muslim women would be governed by Personal Law and not by the Code of Criminal Procedure. This settled the matter for the time being, but for the time being only.

Again, in the USA's war with Vietnam, there was a plethora of strikes and sit-ins to protest against conscription. One of the arguments put forward by the protesters was that in their opinion war is evil and it was against their conscience to participate in the war. The US Supreme Court did not take up this issue on the ground that it was a moral issue and it was not for the courts to decide; it must be settled through the normal political process. So in these cases civil protest comes face to face with morality, echoes of Gandhi's declaration to the British judge, "Condemn me and award the highest punishment, but first ask yourself whether the law you administer is just."<sup>4</sup> I merely raise this question at this stage; I will go further into it later.

Rawls makes a distinction between civil protest and trade union activity. He asserts that civil protest is designed to arouse the conscience of society against some practice or other which constitutes a blot on it. It draws attention to the divergence between professed ideals and facts and urges society to bridge the gap. Thus according to our Constitution untouchability has been abolished and to practice it is a cognisable offence. We are directed by the Constitution to ensure that the resources of the community are distributed so that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth in some groups to the detriment of others, and so on. Any of these could be an issue for civil protest. In trade



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Drawing by Dhiraj Chowdhury



union activity, it is workers who strike to further their own self interest. However, this distinction does not appear to be clear-cut. Take the case of slum dwellers in parts of south Delhi. The building contractors who employ them neither pay the stipulated minimum daily wage, nor provide the housing or sanitation or care for the little children. Suppose they formed a trade union and organised a strike, would this situation not also qualify as worthy of civil protest? The condition of a group, whether it be a section of workers or an ethnic group, may well be a blot on the Indian society which claims to be socialistic in any sense, and would qualify for assistance through civil protest, whether they receive outside help or not.

So far I have considered the circumstances in which civil protest could justifiably be resorted to; I have also gone into the distinction between persuasion and protest. I turn now to the question whether civil protest amounts to coercion and whether coercion is a veiled threat and a notice of aggression.

Professor Vinit Haksar, of Edinburgh University, makes a distinction between a coercive threat and a coercive offer. When the Kashmir militants abduct a person and threaten to kill him unless the government releases half-a-dozen militants charged with murder, they are making what Haksar would describe as a coercive threat. A coercive offer would be like the functioning of the black market. "Petrol is in short supply," the black marketeer says, "but if you must have it, I will sell you a little at twice the fixed price." And this type of reasoning is also used with regard to medicines which may make the difference between life and death in certain circumstances.

In making this distinction, Haksar appears to be contending that whereas coercive threats are morally wrong, coercive offers are not. What he actually says is that "coercive threats are normally unwelcome whereas coercive offers are normally welcome."<sup>5</sup> The illustration he gives of the coercive threat is that of the highwayman saying to a traveller, "Your money or your life". His example of the coercive offer is the butcher who says to his customer, "From now onwards I will sell you meat at twice the rate I was charging before." The point of the distinction seems to be that in the case of the coercive offer the butcher has no moral obligation to go on selling you meat at a certain price. He is withdrawing a previous offer and is making a new one. In the case of the highwayman, there is a moral obligation.



It is morally wrong for him to kill you and it is also wrong for him to steal your money.

Haksar makes some further distinctions on coercive threats and coercive offers but I do not propose to pursue them. The criticism I want to make is in regard to his basic contention as it affects civil disobedience. His language appears to me to be lacking in precision. When he speaks of coercive threats being unwelcome I would ask, unwelcome to whom? The examples themselves, apart from being somewhat frivolous, do not bring out the moral issues that they are intended to. But let me leave these things aside.

Professor Haksar seems to say that the person who is organising civil disobedience corresponds either to the highwayman or to the butcher in his examples. It is he who makes the proposal to the authorities which may take the form of a coercive threat or a coercive proposal. In the case of Gandhi he goes on to qualify his statement by saying that Gandhi would contend that "coercive civil disobedience should never be adopted to over-ride our moral duties."<sup>6</sup> In other words whenever Gandhi resorted to civil disobedience he would make to the authorities a coercive proposal or even a coercive threat but invariably it would be one where his action was necessary as a moral duty. Thus Gandhi could make a coercive proposal to the British during World War II, "Either you must promise us freedom after victory or we will not cooperate in your war effort and in fact we will launch a movement to force you to quit India." For him to pursue the ideal of a free India was a moral duty.

Leaving the moral duty aside for the time being, I take issue with Haksar over the point that in accordance with his analogy the organiser of civil protest corresponds to the highwayman or the butcher. In fact, however, it is the government which has taken a unilateral decision. It has decided, as in the USA's war against Vietnam that "all able-bodied men between the ages of eighteen and forty shall report for defence service." It is a coercive threat because failure to do so will entail punishment. And this was the case over the imposition of the salt tax when Gandhi launched his famous *satyagraha*. The organiser of civil protest is already being subject to a threat and the question is, what shall he do in reply? (The highwayman has robbed me of my money, now what do I do?)

The organiser of protest can argue with the government; and in Rawls' "nearly just" society it might work. What if it doesn't? He then takes the next step, trying to be as non-violent as possible. Eligible



young men sit down on campuses and do not report to the recruitment office. Because of the sit-in, classes are obstructed. The protester says to the government, "You have taken an immoral unilateral decision to declare war. We cannot cooperate with you. If now there is violence, damage to public property, etc. you are responsible." (In Haksar's example, the traveller says to the highwayman, "You have already robbed me of my money, and now you are asking me to feed your hungry horse. OK, I will feed your horse provided you give me back my money. If you don't we will try and get you in some other way.") In other words it is for the authority which has taken the initial unilateral decision (with its implied coercive threat) to show that its decision is correct from the moral point of view.

Ultimately it is the moral nature of the choice between what the government thinks is right and what the protesters think which will determine whom we should support. It is notoriously difficult to arrive at agreement on moral questions. Hence the debate on whether or not civil disobedience is justified in a particular case will continue.

Two dangers need special attention in our present situation. Firstly, civil protest requires discipline on the part of those who practise it. Students and political parties have shown little sense of discipline in recent years. Moreover, there has been a huge growth in the number of hoodlums in our society. A civil protest which starts out with every intention of being non-violent is in danger of being taken over by unruly elements which then becomes an occasion for destruction of life and public property.

Secondly, civil protest is organised within the ambit of respect for the rule of law. A particular law is broken because the protester claims that it is unjust and he urges the adoption of a morally higher law. The danger is that breaking the law may lead to eroding the rule of law. As Rawls points out, there is, as it were, a permissible limit of infringement beyond which lie chaos and disorder which would mean the end of a just society. Minority groups involved in protest could take council together to ensure that occasions for protest are limited to the most important issues.<sup>7</sup>

## References

Much literature is now available on non-violence. I rely here chiefly on the following works: *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls, Harvard, 1971 (hereafter referred to as Rawls); *Taking Rights Seriously*, Ronald Dworkin, Duckworth, 1977 (referred to as Dworkin); Vinit Haksar, *Coercive Proposals (Rawls and Gandhi)*, Political Theory, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1976 (referred to as Haksar); and quotations from Gandhi are taken from *My Non-Violence*, Navajivan Publishing House, 1960 (referred to as Gandhi.)

1. Gandhi, p. 31.
2. Gandhi, p. 3.
3. The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, Vol. III, p. 118, Allen and Unwin, 1969.
4. Quoted by B.R. Nanda in his *Mahatma Gandhi*, Allen and Unwin, 1957, p. 280. See also Dworkin, Chapter 8, Civil Disobedience.
5. Haksar, p. 66.
6. Haksar, p. 77.
7. Rawls, pp. 363–375.



## *Linguistic and Religious Identity in India*

No Bengalee who undergoes this education has any respect left for anything Hindu. If your aim is to produce a whole generation of young people who are not just ignorant of their identity and their heritage, but have in fact, a positive contempt for it, then they must not be taught Sanskrit, the language of the powerful heritage and the unique Indian identity, and they must be taught English and through that the western 'values' so that the Indian youth naturally respects the 'modern', English education. . . .

**T**hese famous words of Macaulay in 1813 emphatically demonstrate the western perception of the induced change in the Indian identity. India is a country of many languages. There are 15 official languages and 1,655 dialects in India. Sanskrit acted as the cultural gold standard, providing a common vocabulary, syntactic structure, semantic-field, and common themes, modes and aesthetic perceptions. By challenging Sanskrit, the protagonists of western modernism, not only hit at the root of Indian identity, but attempted to destroy Indian unity.

It is pointless blaming the colonisers, as their avowed aim was to colonise the minds of those whom they sought to exploit. In good faith many patriots have been victims of propaganda in favour of the noble and the neutral language which supposedly held the key to civility as well as equality. Thus Jawaharlal dreamt that the England of Milton, Shakespeare and its noble speech will reach out to India. That the England of exploitation, as well as the penal code reached India is besides the point. India has to pay the price for the noble speech which accelerated the division between the elite and the masses, the urban and the rural, the educated and the illiterate and

distanced people from their cultural roots. While providing a few with limited access to prosperity, it recolonised the minds of many. Under the banner of success it hid the alienation, anomie and the blind spots of cultural perception. While English provided an identity of sorts, it is of a disengaging type. Unlike outer linguistic, regional, religious or sex based identities which are linked and layered, the English identity turns a neighbour into a stranger while making the distant vaguely familiar.

There are diametrically opposing perceptions about the Indian nationhood. There are those who asserted that "there never was an Indian nation".<sup>1</sup> There are others who say that "It is a country which contains a number of emerging nationalities with different languages and cultures of their own".<sup>2</sup> Both of them are western perceptions though one is propounded by a westerner and another by an Indian. Both miss the complementarity of diverse identities culminating in a macro-identity, the Indian identity. Both of them forget relating tradition with modernity and seeing the regional as a necessary constituent of the pan-Indian.

D.L. Roy, writing about the glory of the motherland, said that though such a country is not to be found anywhere, it is yet the queen of all countries, "she is my motherland". Space is not a geographical concept; it exists in the minds of people. So does the concept of a mother tongue. It is not a language in the ordinary sense of the term, nor is it a dialect. It is an identity token which awaits explanation. In the Indian Census, Teli, a caste name, Haridasi, a sect name, and Bilaspuria, the name of a place are referred to as mother tongues. Pardesi or Bahargaon refer to the fact that the person responding speaks a language different from that spoken in the place he is located in at present. These are primary identities to be linked up with higher level identities which in layers account for the totality of a person's identities.

An inhabitant of Chamba in Himachal Pradesh speaking Chambiali has a Pahadi as well as a Hindi identity. A Bajjhika speaker swearing by that identity has a Maithili as well as a Hindi identity. An Angami speaker from Nagaland has a Nagamese identity. Desia and Nagamese are languages of wider communication. They contain elements of different languages of the region and are mediums of communication among the tribal groups as well as among the tribals and non-tribals of the respective regions. Similarly Sadri or Sadni, a combination of Hindi, Bengali, Oriya, Assamese and a host



of tribal languages of the region are languages of wider communication. So are Naya, the language of Navayats of the Konkan coast, a mixture of Konkani, Marathi, Gujarati and Urdu, and Govan, a mixture of Konkani, Tulu and Portugese. These languages ensure continuity of communication among disparate languages belonging to different language families. Thus one would find that between the primary identity and the pan-Indian identity there are layers of intervening identities. The macro identities have an inclusive relation with the micro and the macro identities are subsumed under the macro without the threat of being assimilated.

Another kind of crisis in language identity is to be seen in the Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi belt. From the census reports one can see shifting language loyalties between the Hindi-Urdu speakers on the one hand and Hindi-Punjabi speakers on the other. Hindi-Urdu has sometimes been considered as two expressions of the same language, Hindu, and sometimes as two styles of one language, Hindustani. Whatever may be the linguistic status, socio-culturally they are considered as two languages. Not only are the sources of inspiration of both different but so are the literary genres and styles.

Another source of stimulation of identity is script. There are ten major writing systems in India. They are Assamese, Bengali, Manipuri, Gujarati, Gurmukhi, Nagari, Oriya, Kannada-Telugu, Malayalam, Tamil, Perso-Arabic and Roman. The last two are acquisitions from external sources. Although Indian languages belong to four language families, the eight major writing systems are derived from a single source, Brahmi. Nagari is employed for writing Hindi and Marathi. But the languages are sufficiently rooted in history to seek script-based identities. But the Bodos, who were seeking to establish an identity different from the Assamese, rejected the Assamese script as a medium of writing. They opted for the Roman Script, but were eventually persuaded to accept the Nagari script as a medium of writing Bodo.

There are several minor writing systems in the country. Some of them are revealed whereas some others are invented. So:ra is a revealed script whereas Ol Chikki is an invented script. Ol Chikki is a suggested script for Santhali. Ol Chikki was invented by Raghunath Murma, a Santhali himself, and seeks to unify the Santhali language which is written in Oriya, Bengali, Nagari and Roman scripts. Konkani is written in Nagari, Kannada, Malayalam and Roman



scripts. Konkani written in Malayalam script seeks to establish an independent identity. Thus the script-based identity runs counter to language-based identity. Sindhi is another such case. The quarrel between two groups contending for Nagari and Perso-Arabic scripts has stood in the way of developing the language.

There are scripts for specific purposes. The Grantha script was created for writing Sanskrit as the Tamil script was found inadequate for the purpose. The Modi and Karani scripts were used for record keeping and accountancy purposes. The users of these scripts are marked social groups. Many scripts are designed to replace the multiplicity of scripts and provide a unified identity to all Indians. Instead, they seem to have added to the multiplicity.

Different religions have their language and script. In other words different languages and scripts are identified with specific religious faiths. Urdu with Perso-Arabic script is identified with Islam, as Sanskrit and Nagari scripts are identified with Hinduism. In spite of the fact that Urdu is a common heritage of Hindus and Muslims alike and significant portions of Muslims speak regional languages, Urdu as an identity token of Muslims persists. The Gurumukhi script is identified with Sikhism. Bengali language is identified with the Brahmos and the Pali language is identified with Buddhism. These are identity markers in their respective contexts.

As plurilingualism has its problems of identity, so have multiple religious faiths, beliefs, castes and communities. The word Hindu at one time referred to all the inhabitants of Hindustan (India). Later as the meaning of the term was restricted to mean first the non-Islam and secondly the non-Islam and non-Christian populace, it lost part of its inclusive character. Still the word Hindu remained inclusive and referred to a host of gods and spirits, faiths and beliefs representing different castes and communities. Apart from other influences Hinduism had over the guest religions, the pluralisation and hierarchisation of those monolithic religions is the more prominent feature. Some sort of internal hierarchy exists among the different religious groups of the Muslims and Christians.

Western scholars have divided the Indian caste system into three categories, namely Brahmin, non-Brahmin and the Scheduled caste. This is not correct as these are not primary caste identities. Instead, they stand for caste complexes. Hebbar/Mandyam-Ayanger-Brahmin-Hindu is one kind of hierarchisation, where as Badgalay/



Tengalay-Vaishnav-Brahmin-Hindu is another. The micro identities are tied up with the macro in such a manner that they are not adversaries. They complement one another and co-exist within a macro framework without the threat of losing their identity. It is interesting to note that the Jati system consisting of 4000 castes and communities operates within the four-fold Varna system each illuminating the other, explaining the micro-macro relationship.

Among the Hindus at one end of the spectrum there are those who do not believe in the existence of God, while at the other end there are those who believe in the existence of countless gods. In between are monism, dualism, triad, animism, animatism and all possible combinations of godheads. There were the Smartas, worshipers of five gods. All these gods have their hierarchies which like social hierarchies change over time and space. For example, in the past Indra occupied the highest position. Later Vishnu became the most important among gods. At one time Prajapati was supreme while he lost his importance at a later period. In North India, Rama and Krishna occupied the coveted position, while in the South, Siva was supreme. Worshipers of each deity sought a distinct identity to be subsumed under a macro identity, the Hindu identity.

Hinduism is a tradition of tolerance and compassion. It stands for the freedom of spirit, freedom from the limitations imposed by space, time and dialogue and is grounded in the immensity of space and time. One is free to call himself a Hindu practising the Santha values and ideals or a Hindu believing in Sikhism. When a Hindu's beliefs and practices threaten the security, prosperity and the future of another community he then ceases to be a Hindu. Hinduism is accepting diversity and ending of divisions. The comparison with all forms and tolerance of all differences frees it from all narrowness. Its all inclusive world views does not see confrontation of entities. Instead it views all entities as the manifestation of the supreme and the entire cosmos as permeated by the divine.

It may be seen that between the atom and the cosmos there are many layers of identities. Each entity is a bundle of identities and they mutually communicate in a network of relations.

When the Bhakti movement gave rise to a Santha tradition, groups following different Sadhakas sought specific recognition. Thus, whether they were followers of Sur, Tulsi, Sri Chaitanya, Sankara Deva or Jagannath Das or of Dhaneswar, Tukaram, Alwars,

Nayanmars or the Lingayat saints, they were recognised as followers of those specific faiths. All of them coexisted under the macro label of Hinduism.

Thus, it will be seen that respect for the different is the cornerstone of Hinduism. Any plural system can survive only on the basis of such respect. It has to have an inclusive logic. Linear and binary logic excludes individuals and groups and leads to the imposition of the tyranny of the majority or of the powerful. It must be recognised that integration and cohesion cannot be the result of compulsion or coercion. National integration results from the recognition of identities, their non-recognition results in national disintegration.

### References

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## Laughter and Compassion

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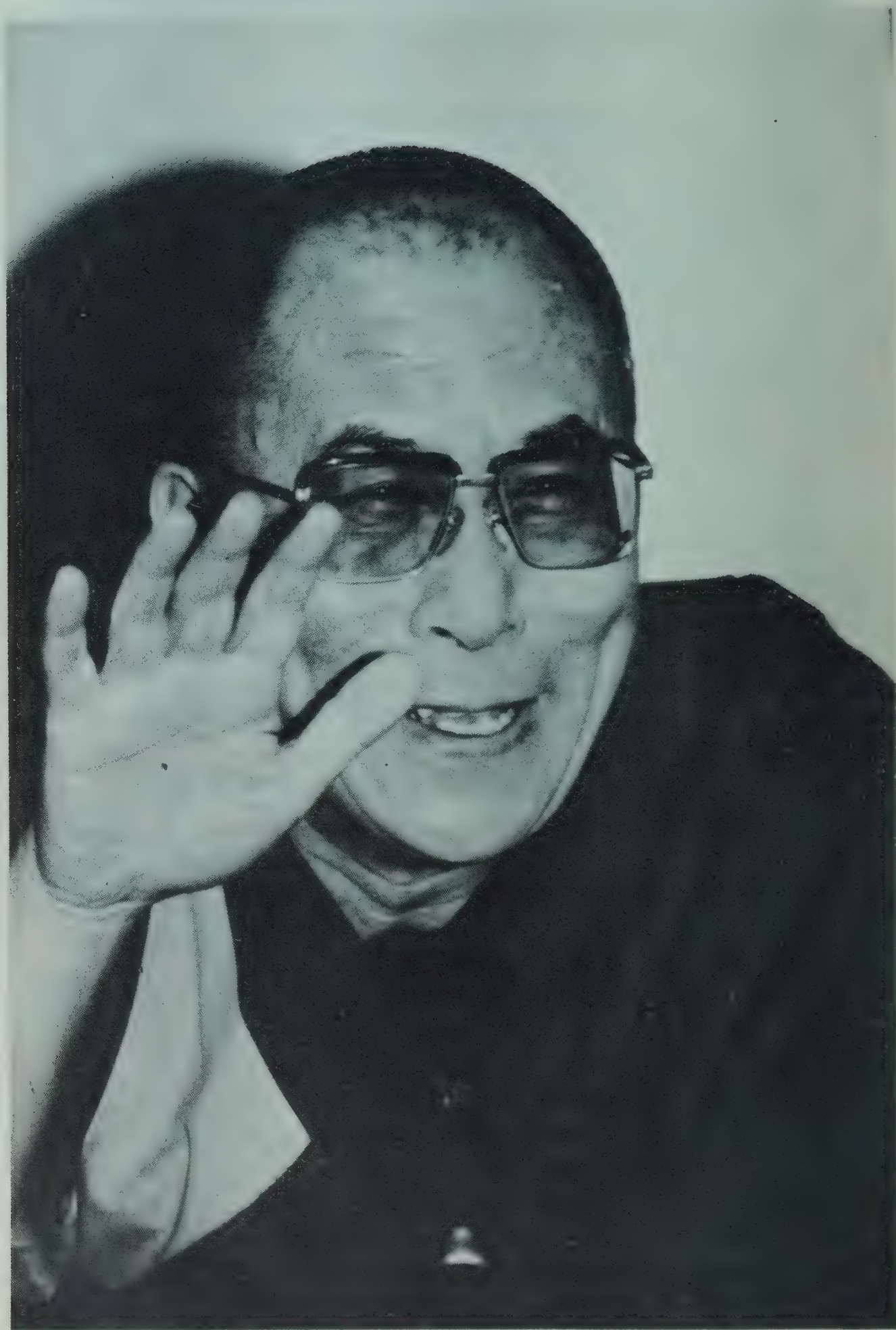
HIS HOLINESS TENZIN GYATSO  
THE XIVTH DALAI LAMA OF TIBET  
in conversation with Geeti Sen and Rajiv Mehrotra

GEETI *I would like to begin, your Holiness, by asking you as to*  
SEN *whether you would define Buddhism as a religion. Many other religions the Judaic, the Christian, the Islamic religion, even the Hindu and Jain religions—speak about the beginning and end of the world. Buddhism concerns itself with norms of human behaviour, with moral conduct. Would you say then that it is a religion?*

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA *According to some, strictly speaking, religion means a form of faith based on the theory of a Creator or God. Since Buddhism does not subscribe to this, it is not a religion but rather a science of the mind.*

G S *How do you feel about this matter, personally?*

H H *If that is the interpretation, then naturally I think Buddhism is more than a religion. In Buddhist practice faith has an important role, but we consider genuine faith as something that should evolve from reason. Therefore in Buddhism there is emphasis on logic. In the Mahayana tradition, in particular, in the beginning the practitioner needs to be skeptical and to investigate—either through reason, or through his own experience and arrive at his own conclusions. Once he develops insights and understanding through logic, his belief becomes firm and unshakeable. The basis of Buddhism is practice: the training of our own minds. God alone or faith or blessings are not sufficient. Of course the blessings of a Buddha or enlightened beings can be an important factor; but*



*H.H. The Dalai Lama*



in order to purify yourself, the major effort must come from yourself.

G S *This brings up another question which I had in mind. Last time I came to Dharamsala, I had spent some time on the steps of the monastery, fascinated like everyone else by the debating sessions and the sheer enjoyment of it for the young monks. For me it is a little confusing as to why Buddhism places so much stress on logic. Sharpening the mind or 'training the mind', may be, are two different things; but training the mind to become alert and analytical does not seem to help a person to arrive at a stage of harmony with the world. You develop critical faculties and individual perceptions—if you are good at debates!*

H H In Buddhism, particularly Mahayana Buddhism, the practice of the monk's precepts or even the layman's precepts are not in themselves directly related to logic. In certain techniques of training the mind, such as *samadhi*, there is again no direct connection with logic. But the realisation of a deeper reality shows that every phenomenon and every experience possesses a duality: the appearance and the reality. In Buddhist philosophy there are four major schools of thought. According to *Madhyamika*, the most profound school of thought, appearances appear to have an independent existence. If you accept that existence, if you believe that the reality is as it appears, then this is due to your own subjective understanding, your mental projections.

G S *So 'training of the mind' is an attempt not to be subjective?*

H H Yes. It is the distinction between appearance and reality. Debate is a training in that kind of practice. Debate involves two people; you are debating with someone else on the nature of reality. But in meditation, there is debate within yourself. Take for example the debate between hatred and compassion, which through logical debate finds a

valid foundation for positive emotions.

RAJIV MEHROTRA *One of the strengths of the Tibetan techniques of training the mind has been the ability to enable people to move beyond the purely analytical intellectual processes, and transform that into some form of concrete experience or action. It is very often a risk in the Western traditions that people will go into a great deal of intellectualising without it actually transforming their personalities. What are the Buddhist techniques that enable this transformation to take place?*

H H *I think, moderation.*

R M *I am really referring to the Tantrayana traditions, the practices where you can translate an intellectual understanding of something into an action—into a way of being.*

H H *Firstly, the practice of intellectual thinking is a process aimed at purifying oneself—the ultimate goal is Buddhahood. Now in order to develop that, the process followed systematically by the practitioner enables the practice of wisdom. It becomes very clear that human knowledge is the process, not the ultimate aim. Through using human intelligence we develop conviction; through conviction we can generate genuine effort; through genuine effort real transformation becomes possible.*

*To a certain extent, just faith can sometimes transform the inner experience. For a very devoted person some extraordinary transformation may develop through faith or meditation alone. But then at a certain time if that person develops some doubt, then the validity of all these experiences can suddenly disappear!*

*However if you were to approach your practice through investigation and logic, until there are no contradictions and your understanding becomes clear and precise—if you practice accordingly, and*



with faith, when you experience transformation there is no possibility of developing doubt.

G S *You have mentioned in your essays that the whole purpose of living is to cleanse your mind and cleanse it of the three impurities: hatred, attachment and ignorance, or obscuration. And you suggest that a person can change completely . . . I wonder, if in a practical sense, is this really possible? I am not speaking of your Holiness, I am speaking of such transformation in ordinary human beings. . .*

H H No problem, you can include me—I am not God.

G S *In your lectures you have stressed altruism as a basic precept in Mahayana Buddhism, which helps the individual to overcome his own problems and see the world of humanity as a whole. Perhaps, if you like, through the practice of altruism one sees the world in perspective. You even go so far as to say altruism is a practical approach to life. Could you explain?*

H H In Tibetan we have a saying—*many illnesses can be cured by one medicine: love and compassion*. Love and compassion are the ultimate source of human contentment. Our need for them lies at the very core of our identity. Yet, they are often omitted from many spheres of social interaction. Confined to family and home, their practice in public life is typically thought of as impractical, even naive. This is tragic. In my view, the practice of compassion is not a symptom of unrealistic idealism. It is the most effective means to pursue one's own interest as well as that of others.

The real source of cooperation lies in recognising the practical value of altruism. A mind committed to compassion, is like an ever-full reservoir; a constant resource of energy, determination and kindness. It is like a seed, which cultivated, gives rise to many other good qualities, such as forgiveness, tolerance, inner strength and

the confidence to overcome fear and insecurity. It is indeed like an elixir; capable of transmuting many an unhappy situation into a beneficial outcome. Therefore, the expression of love and compassion should not be limited to one's friends and family. Nor is compassion just the responsibility of clergy, health care or social workers. It is the necessary business of every sector of the human community.

Whether a conflict lies in the field of politics, business, or religion, an altruistic approach is frequently the sole means of solving it. Often, the very concepts we employ to mediate a dispute, are themselves the cause of the problem. At such times, when a solution seems impossible to reach, it is useful for all parties to recall the basic human nature which unites them. Doing so, will help break the impasse and perhaps, in the long run, make it easier for each to obtain their goal. Though no side may be fully satisfied, at the very least, if each makes concessions, the danger of further conflict will be eliminated. We all know that this form of compromise is the most effective way to solve problems. The question is, why do we not pursue it more often?

R M *What do you believe are the reasons why, despite the obvious logic of doing so, we fail to work together? Does the fault lie in our social architecture—the basic structures of family and community we have organised our lives around? Does it lie in our external facilities—in our machines, science and technology?*

H H *When I consider the failure to cooperate in human society, I can only believe that it stems from ignorance of our inter-dependent nature. Thinking of this, I am often moved by the example of small insects, such as bees.*

Nature's law dictates that, in order to survive, bees must work together. As a result, they



instinctively possess a sense of social responsibility. They have no constitution, no law, no police, no religion or moral training, but because of their nature, they labor faithfully together. Occasionally, they may fight, but in general, based on cooperation, the whole colony survives. We human beings have a constitution, laws and a police force. We have religion, remarkable intelligence and a heart with a great capacity to love. We have many extraordinary qualities, but in actual practice, I think we are behind those small insects. In some regards, I feel that we are poorer than the bees.

For instance, millions of people live together, all over the world, in large cities. Despite such proximity, many are lonely. Some, lacking even a single human being with whom to share their deepest feelings, live in a perpetual state of agitation. This is very sad. People are not like solitary animals who only associate in order to mate. If that was our character, why would we have built such large towns and cities to begin with? Unfortunately, though we are social animals compelled to coexist, we very much lack a sense of responsibility for our fellow human beings.

I believe that Mahayana teachings explain the concept of altruism thoroughly. It is something of great importance to all of us, it is basic to all human beings. Affection, although limited and not infinite, is yet a kind of altruism that is the foundation of human existence. Most parents even in the bird and animal species, possess a kind of limited altruism for the survival of their young—especially the mothers, with whom there is an intimate and special link.

**R M** *A mother's affection for her child is an emotion. It is likely that this is some form of inbred genetic impulse. However in the western, and in some eastern traditions, in general, emotions are considered ennobling, the qualities of a full life . . . In the Buddhist tradition we*

*consider emotions to be defilements. How, then, is this kind of emotion to be justified?*

H H At one of our discussions with scientists we agreed that emotion means some strong feeling of the mind. Then in that case, compassion is also a kind of emotion. So, the Buddha also felt emotion. In itself it is not necessarily negative. We finally came to the conclusion that there are negative and positive emotions.

R M *How would you distinguish between the two?*

H H Those emotions which create suffering in the long run even if there may be some temporary benefit or happiness—those are considered negative emotions. Altruism or compassion engenders no harm, and in the long run creates happiness. So it is positive emotion.

There is no absolute right or wrong; every emotion or action is relative and dependent upon the circumstances. A specific action under certain circumstances can be right and in others wrong, this is the conclusion. What is the real meaning of emotion, I don't know.

R M *Would you say that emotion needs to be subjected to the scrutiny of reasoning and analysis?*

H H Yes. But we need to understand that what you can achieve only through the emotions is limited. Now for example in my own case, with my practice of *shunya*, of emptiness, this you can't feel through emotion, you must develop reason. After you have developed reasoning and become familiar with that then some emotion I think develops. When I think about emptiness then a certain different kind of experience or feeling develops—something that I think is emotion. There are two types of emotion: some emotions spontaneously happen, some emotions are arrived at through reason.



R M *With regard to shunyata and the experience of emptiness, is that an emotion or not? Does it generate a feeling or a sensation? There is a feeling among those outside the Buddhist community that shunyata equates with a kind of nothingness—nihilism. How would you even attempt to describe shunyata to a lay person?*

H H *Again recently, I came to another conclusion: that desire or love without attachment and without hatred is not a negative emotion. The realisation of shunya, has a very important role here.*

When you develop some very forceful emotion, say anger but without hatred, you can do this with a compassionate intention. It can look like attachment or suggest a very strong feeling of closeness, yet there is no attachment. Now these distinctions are made not by words but by again another kind of emotion or another mental concept. Here the realisation of *shunya* plays a very important role. Usually attachment, or a negative emotion develops on the basis of the concept that the object of your emotion is something absolute. It is seen as something completely negative when you have feelings of anger. On the other hand if you see something as beautiful and good then the tendency is to accept the object as being absolutely positive. Now in the realisation of *shunya* there is no absolute. The negative is of course negative, but there is no absolute negative. If according to common sense it is negative then you are free to reject it.

R M *You have mentioned that as a consequence of your interaction with scientists, you felt that your world view, your perceptions and responses may have changed. If so, in what significant ways have they changed?*

H H *One factor for a change in my understanding is certainly the result of my meeting with scientists; the other is my own investigation, my own doubts which now have been cleared. But in most cases*

this is a case of a better understanding of the exact meaning of English words and how they represent Buddhist ideas . . . . and there is also a karmic connection.

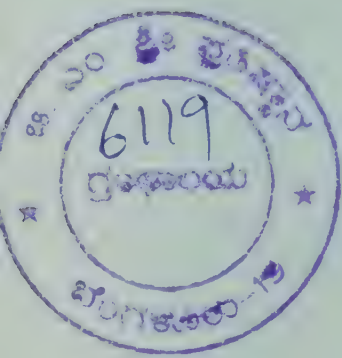
GS *In your writings and lectures, you have spoken about karma. This has also been said to me by Tibetan doctors, to explain some illness or someone's unexplainable, unjustified ailments as karma—which have been carried over from the previous life. I suppose you would call me a non-believer, and it might be my western training for seven or eight years. But for many people today, it is difficult to accept this idea, that it is a karma that you carry over like a bundle of old clothes, from your past life into your new life.*

*I am willing to believe, and I do believe in reincarnation. I believe that animals, my dog, my cat, are almost human—they could be human! But I find it very difficult to understand how karma is carried from one life into another.*

HH *I believe that those events which create pain or pleasure, those events have some karmic link. It seems to me that the notion of rebirth is more difficult (to accept). Once you accept rebirth then it follows that there must be causes for events which produce pain or pleasure.*

*If you accept the Creator, then there are many contradictions. If you do not accept the Creator and you accept these things coincidentally—without any particular causes then that also is uncomfortable. So then, the only logical explanation is karma. Karma means action. One important factor is that every event happens due to conditions and causes. Now when we see the cause, it means action or karma follows. When we say condition, karma is involved indirectly.*

*For example, this generation of Tibetans has suffered very much. The ultimate cause is our own karma, or previous actions. The immediate*





provocation is the Chinese invasion. So it is incorrect just to blame our own karma without realising the Chinese are at fault, and it is equally incorrect just to blame the Chinese for what has happened.

**R M** *Perhaps some confusion arises from an incomplete understanding of the Buddhist idea of dependent arising, the aspects of cause and effect—that establishes the connection, the continuum for the past life into the present life . . .*

**G S** *Both Hinduism and Buddhism believe in the after life; in the idea of the soul or the atman that lives on. More importantly how do you look at yourself, as a reincarnation, a Bodhisattva?*

**H H** I am not a Bodhisattva. I am trying to become a Bodhisattva. I don't know whether I can achieve it within this life time.

**R M** *The Nobel Prize for Peace enhanced your potential role as an international campaigner for peace. Since then you have moved increasingly beyond your role as a Buddhist spiritual master or a leader for the political agenda of a free Tibet. Generally, in the global community the issues of government and international problems have seemed divorced from a spiritual dimension. How do you see your role in this context?*

**H H** Personally, I see no difference in my role before or after receiving the Nobel Prize. Whenever there is the possibility or opportunity for me to contribute spiritually, to bring some peace of mind, through personal contact or public talks, I try to induct new ideas or talk about new ways to be a happier person, a more peaceful person, based on my own experience.

Some people call me a peacemaker. I think they exaggerate. In reality I have offered a few words of solace, may be brought quietness to a few disturbed minds. I share some of their sorrow and

also my own experiences and it helps. I make some jokes and they smile. That I consider my small service.

G S *But now you have a new role foisted on you, an international role of leadership. In one sense, of course, there is the notion of altruism which you have been speaking about, and, you speak of 'informed altruism' as something that can be used in international politics. This is a new concept, as far as I know, in order to promote global harmony.*

H H *Recent events have happened as I had expected—in a sense some of my ideas and speeches seem something like predictions. I also think the world itself has become more positive, changed in such a way to become more receptive to my ideas. The award of the Nobel Peace Prize gives this indication—the real human spirit has become more responsive. Now for example the collapse of communism is not by nuclear weapons, but by the genuine natural desire of the people—to be free.*

R M *You have been, in a sense, a victim of communist ideology, yet you have frequently talked about the positive aspects of communism and its similarity to Buddhist ideals?*

H H *Communism espoused many noble ideals, including a certain sense of universal responsibility, reflected in its egalitarian ethics and its doctrine of internationalism. At the same time, communists every where placed a tremendous stress on the use of hatred and mistrust to implement their vision. As a result, their attempts at indoctrination proved disastrous. For instance, communist governments went to tremendous lengths, systematically designing the entire flow of information and education within their societies, to make their citizens work diligently for the common good. However, though their radical and aggressive*



organisations may have been necessary to destroy previously oppressive regimes, once that goal was fulfilled, the same techniques could neither convince nor really permit people to build a prosperous, harmonious community. In fact, because communism relied on force to promote its beliefs, it has utterly failed. The suffering it produced could not, ultimately, be sustained by human nature.

No matter how severely imposed, crude power can never subdue mankind's basic desire for freedom. The hundreds of thousands of people who marched in the cities of Eastern Europe in 1989 proved this. They simply expressed their human need for freedom and democracy. It was very moving. Their demands had nothing whatsoever to do with promoting a new ideology, did they? They just spoke from their hearts, demonstrating that desire for freedom stems from the core of human nature. Freedom, in fact, is the very source of creativity for individuals and society alike. It is not food, shelter and clothing. If we possess these basic requirements but lack the precious air of liberty to sustain our deeper nature, we are only half-human; like animals who remain satisfied once their physical needs are met.

**R M** *What have been some of the lessons for you because of the changes in Eastern Europe, the revolt against communist regimes there?*

**H H** I feel that the peaceful revolutions of 1989 have taught us many great lessons. One is the value of truth. People don't like a person or system that bullies, cheats and lies. These activities are essentially opposed to the human spirit. Therefore, even though those who practice deception and the use of force may gain considerable success in the short term, eventually they will be overthrown. On the other hand, everyone appreciates the truth. Respect for the truth is really in our blood. Moreover,

truth is the best guarantor—the real foundation—of freedom and democracy. It doesn't matter if one is weak or strong or if truth will still pertain.

Truth ultimately made the movements of 1989 successful. A lack of truth and the resulting unjust, corrupt and ruthless behaviour is why so many governments lost their people's faith and were toppled. That fact alone should remind us that truth itself is still seriously abused in much of our political life. The conduct of international relations, in particular, pays very little respect to truth. Inevitably, weaker nations suffer manipulation and oppression from stronger ones, just as weaker sections in many societies do from those who are better off. A reaffirmation of the value of truth can help to change this and the events of 1989 can assist that goal. Above all, they indicate that the simple expression of truth is an immense force in the human mind and, as a result, in the shaping of history.

A second great lesson from Eastern Europe has been that of peaceful change. In the past, enslaved people have always resorted to violence in their struggle to be free. Now, these peaceful revolutions, following in the footsteps of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. have given future generations a tremendous example of successful, non-violent change. When, in the future, the need arises to change society, our descendants can look back to 1989 as a paradigm for peaceful struggle: a real success story on an unprecedented scale, involving more than half a dozen nations and hundreds of millions of people. In addition, 1989 has shown that human nature, at its most fundamental level, not only desires freedom, but peace as well.

G S *You have spoken a great deal in your autobiography, Freedom in Exile, about your belief that democracy is the only viable political system and that all the peoples of the*



*world will arrive at democracy. This of course is forging ahead of time, but what kind of democracy do you conceive in the future free Tibet.*

R M *Is there a Buddhist democracy?*

G S *That is the point. What will be new about this democracy, will it be one of non-violence?*

H H *To my mind democracy is more compassionate, more harmonious, more friendly than any other system. It respects others' rights and considers others equally as human brothers and sisters. Although you might disagree with them, you have to respect their views.*

*So now here in India, religion needs to be more spiritual. If politics is more humane, then politics becomes more positive and constructive. Religion too, with that same spirit becomes more constructive, if it is true religion. Without that essence, it is just the name of a religion, or faith, or attachment. The fanatics, I think, are too devoted to their own religion.*

*Historically, I think that India has produced some of the greatest minds and the best of philosophy. Among these is the concept of *ahimsa*—although now there seems to be much more of the practice of *non-ahimsa*—except perhaps in South India, where for historical reasons it seems that the people, whether religious-minded or not, have more humility and gentleness. Perhaps they have preserved the true Indian tradition to a greater extent.*

R M *North Indians may object to this observation. I am a north Indian!*

H H *(laughs) Anyhow, we seem to be lacking in the general human spirit—except for some individuals, of course. My personal feeling is that if one remains arrogant, it evokes arrogance in the other person.*

Humility on the other hand, brings a response of humility. The politicians of today seem to need more self-discipline, more humility—the qualities which could be seen in personalities such as Gandhiji and Dr Rajendra Prasad. On my first visit to India when I had met Dr Rajendra Prasad, his learning and his humility impressed me. He was almost like a Bodhisattva!

It does not matter whether one is a religious personage or a politician. There has to be genuine human sincerity in dealing with people, and an openness of mind in dealing with their problems. This creates an atmosphere of mutual understanding and dialogue where common interests can be developed and ideas exchanged. Ultimately this is to everyone's advantage and everyone is happy.

Today, this feeling has been lost. Usually, there are individual negative feelings of competition, based on jealousy and hatred. I don't know what could be devised as a method to change this (trend)—I think, perhaps you need another colonial power! (laughs) The movement for independence produced better Indians who were fearless and genuinely self-less. Once you got independence, these sort of leaders took rest in the back seat.

**R M** *Speaking of the leaders taking rest, you have yourself renounced a role for the Dalai Lama in the political leadership of the free Tibet of the future. In what way is your position different?*

**H H** No. Even suppose that Mahatma Gandhiji had lived longer, I think though he would have remained an ordinary citizen—he would have continued to experience a heavy responsibility about the India that he had shaped. Similarly, my intention is to do that without taking on any government position, there are immense



possibilities (to work at practical solutions?). So long as I am respected and popular, so long as I remain a genuine Buddhist monk, perhaps I can do more. This is what I feel. So when I say I will not take any position in the future government of Tibet, it does not mean I have lost interest or am withdrawing from responsibility. That is not the case.

**R M** *The U.S. Congress has recently passed a bipartisan resolution recognising Tibet as an occupied country. Now you have many areas where support is growing dramatically. You have met President George Bush, the British Prime Minister, Mr John Major, you have sat and silently meditated with Vaclav Havel. There is growing, mushrooming international support despite Chinese obduracy. What is your prediction for the future of free Tibet? How confident do you feel? And what kind of time frame would you predict?*

**H H** According to these recent developments, including the Chinese democratic movement and specially the events in Moscow, and also the spirit of the Tibetans within Tibet, I think there will be major changes in the next four to five years. There are also some spiritual mysterious signs. Definitely, within this century I think we can return—then the refugees will be together with those in Tibet.

The day will come. But I still don't know what kind of arrangement or structure will be worked out between Tibet and China. That I don't know.

**R M** *Your Holiness, you have announced recently, in the United States, that you would like to visit Tibet. What has prompted this decision to go to Tibet at this time?*

**H H** In my first proposal made before the European Parliament at Strassbourg there were five points: the demilitarisation of Tibet, the respect for human rights, the immediate halt to the transfer of the Chinese population into Tibet and a commitment to preserving the natural environment. These points

are still valid. With my second proposal I suggested a possible structure for the relationship between Tibet and China. The lack of a Chinese response has made it invalid. Now it is the turn of the Chinese to come forward with a proposal. Due to recent global changes the time is now favourable for us. If I remain silent, then I may lose an opportunity.

Meanwhile with Tibet, the situation seems to have worsened with increasing suffering and torture. The chances of a visit materialising are 50–50. I am very happy at the possibility. There may be some personal risk—but my visit should be an open one, with complete freedom. I would like some important global figures and the international media to accompany me. I really want to show the world how the Tibetan people feel.

**R M** *To return to the question of democracy, you have encouraged elections and setting up a parliament in exile, you have talked about democracy as an ideal system. What will be uniquely Buddhist about the kind of democracy that you envisage for Tibet?*

**H H** In the organisation of Buddhist monks, the rules are very clearly founded on democratic principles. According to the Vinaya Sutra, the decision and unanimous agreement of at least a hundred monks is required. Buddhist monks believed, as you know, in a religion, with no caste, no race, only bred of a commitment to practice.

I have no idea how Buddhism will function within a democracy in Tibet. There are not only Buddhists but also Muslims, and some Christians, and the Bons. Very few Hindus. Logically, there will be some extreme atheists. So personally I prefer secularism as the basis. I suggested secularism when we made a draft of the constitution. But the vote of the deputies went against my suggestion, with 20 agreeing and 24 disagreeing on secularism. So here is a case of democracy!



R M *Do you feel disappointed about the political support that the Tibetan cause is receiving from India at the present time?*

H H As regards India, I would like to mention the tremendous support which we have received from the Indian Government for our survival, and we are very very grateful. Their support has been generous at the humanitarian level; especially in education, in the preservation of our Tibetan culture, and even our Tibetan identity. Without this we could not have been so optimistic about our future.

As regards support I have the opinion that the Government of India is over cautious. According to our experience when you deal with the Chinese, if your stand is very firm and clear they will make space for your position. However if you are meek they act bolder. The time has come to review the entire policy. This policy was formulated in 1950–51 and a document was perhaps prepared in 1954. In reality there has been no change in the policy towards us though the world is rapidly changing. In 1950 Pandit Nehru made a statement in Parliament regarding Tibet. Unfortunately the Indian leaders only take part of the statement that said that they consider Tibet a part of China.

R M *Nehru said in the same statement in Parliament that the ultimate decision about whether Tibet would be a part of China, is the final decision of the people of Tibet.*

H H I have that statement here, very wisely stated. Now that part of Pandit Nehru's statement has been ignored. The question is, the Tibetan people have made many sacrifices—what are their feeling now?

G S *Your Holiness, with the money from the Nobel Peace Prize, you have established the Foundation for Universal Responsibility. What will it do, what will it foster, what*

*do you think it will achieve?*

HH The Foundation for Universal Responsibility is founded on Compassion, the Buddhist ideal.

The new foundation will implement projects to benefit people everywhere, focusing especially on assisting non-violent methods, on improving communication between religion and science, on securing human rights and democratic freedoms, and on conserving and restoring our precious Mother Earth.

It will bring together people of different faiths, persuasions, professions and nationalities. It will reach out beyond the premises of Buddhism or the political agenda of Tibet seeking to cultivate a commitment to Universal Responsibility amongst all people. It will be a Foundation established to act from the heart of the Tibetan people to do good and helpful things not for their own country but for people throughout the world.

I am convinced that there is a great need for the development of Universal Responsibility. I also feel that there are many ways of trying to develop this feeling and attitude. I am still trying to find which method will be the most effective. I have a few impressions: I feel that one way is for each of us to develop a liberal outlook and to have a broader perspective on our own sufferings and the sufferings of others. We need to experience and understand that every sentient being wants happiness and an end to suffering. In a shrinking and increasingly inter-dependent world, this is not possible in isolation. I feel that today we try to solve many problems superficially and in isolation, without investigating the real cause of the problem.

I think the most important thing is to develop a feeling for others, a feeling of closeness and trying to share their suffering. I believe that this is not a matter of any particular religion, ideology or philosophy but an expression of humanness. While

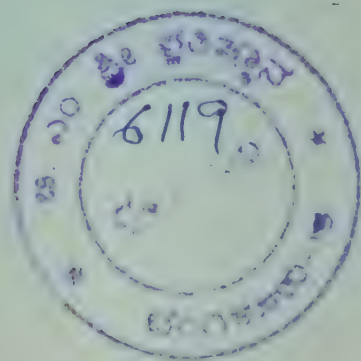


I believe religion does help to develop this sense of Universal Responsibility, it is not necessarily so. If we can develop this feeling of closeness and a genuine understanding of inter-dependence many of our contemporary problems can be resolved. It will encourage a more harmonious relationship with our environment and with each other no matter what our nationality, faith or ideology.

Usually, I do not like to create organisations. In the past people had urged me to start Buddhist societies, but I had avoided the risk. If we have a Dalai Lama's organisation, then immediately there is a sense of demarcation with those within and those outside (the fold). The Foundation is not there to promote any one individual, political ideology or cause. It is rather to build bridges of cooperation and understanding. Now with this, there is no such risk—one organisation, inclusive of all... Now everyone is speaking about Universal Responsibility—which is excellent. I myself no longer hold the responsibility!

(Laughs)

GS *Thank you. That was a most enjoyable and also illuminating discussion. I came with a little fear and some apprehension—but in this hour and a half all this has vanished.*





# Dabur & Ayurveda



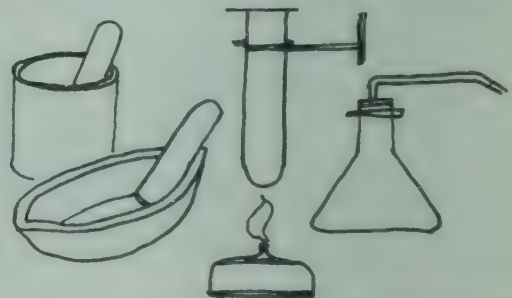
**A**yurveda, the Science of life, serves four purposes in the life of man—to preserve health, to promote it, treatment in case of sickness, and longevity of life. The knowledge of Ayurveda was given by Lord Bramha to Daksha Prajapati who carried on the tradition as a closely guarded secret. Ayurveda seeks to correct the origin of the disease rather than going in for symptomatic treatment. Its main advantage is the absence of any kind of harmful side-effects.



**R**esearch and Development have gone side by side with tradition. With ultramodern equipment, we have achieved standardisation and maintained quality. Ever improving packaging has made our products acceptable through changing times. At Dabur Research Foundation, herbs, minerals and metals undergo qualitative analysis, and age old recipes are rediscovered. A three thousand year old such recipe using Amla and over forty herbs is now being marketed as Dabur Chyawanprash.



**H**erbs and minerals, which are the main constituents of Ayurvedic medicines, were used extensively by Dr. S.K. Burman in the great plague of Bengal. He was a physician of limitless compassion and dedicated his life to alleviate pain and suffering. He used the little known form of mail-order supply and treated thousands of patients when medicines were in short supply. On the foundations of his futuristic vision was built the company 'DABUR'—world's largest manufacturer of Ayurvedic Medicines.



**Y**ears of hard work, caring, commitment and vision combined with the use of modern equipment, computers, marketing and management techniques has helped Dabur to manufacture and market over four hundred varied products, many of them are accepted and acclaimed in the international market.

For  
Health  
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Beauty Care

# Dabur





*Wistful*

*Photo essay by Sharat Kumar*



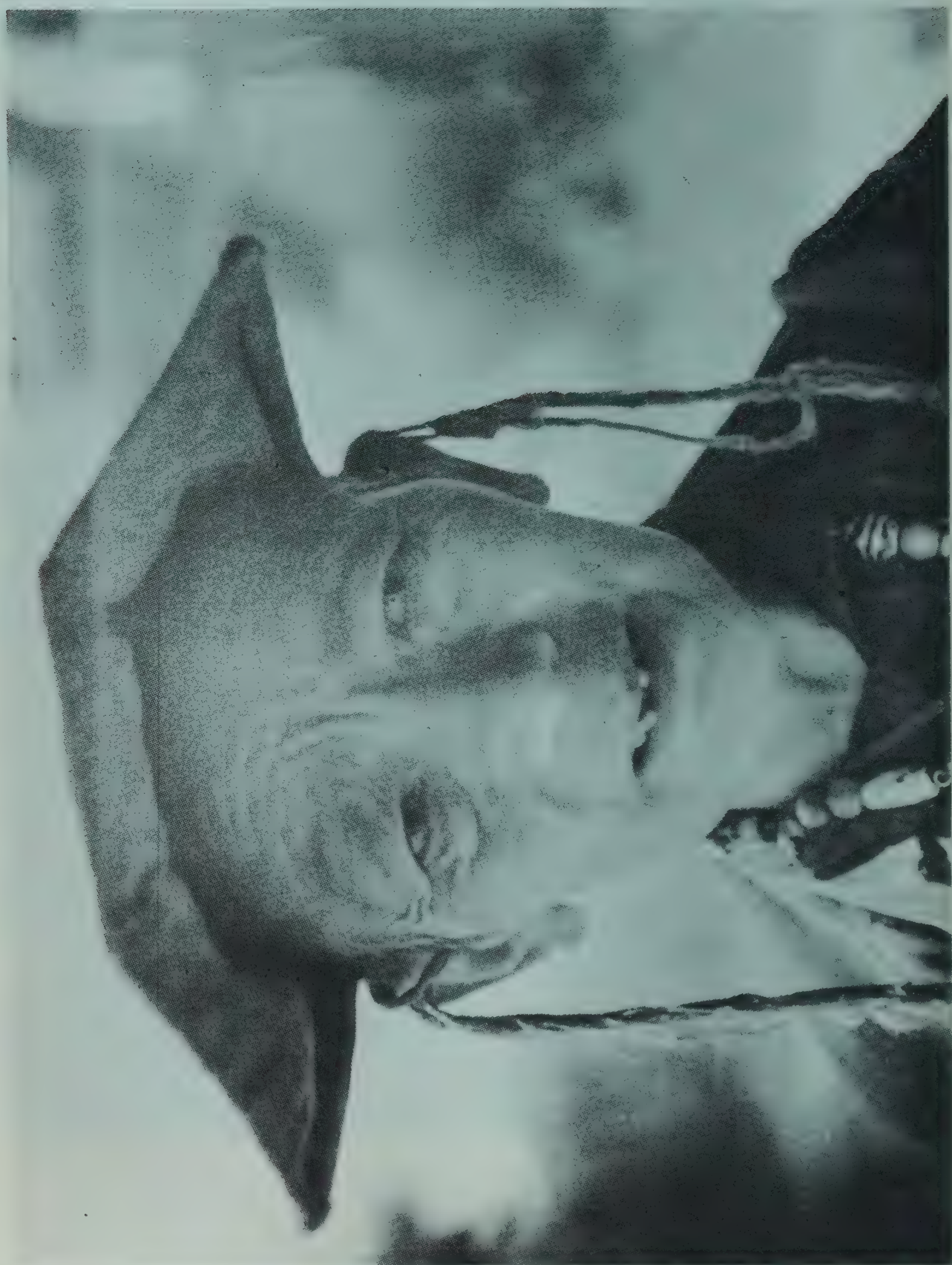


*Query*





*The Monk*



*The Nun*





Wrinkles





*Laughter*



## *Reflections on the Tibetans*

**I**t was through many a wandering trek in the Himalayas that I first discovered the fascination of Tibetans and the Tibetan face. I also had the good fortune of a long stay in Sikkim where my official duties brought me in touch with a large number of Tibetans employed in road camps. I carried my cameras everywhere with me and took photographs. And I discovered how easily the craft of photography brought an easy communion with these people. Hesitant formal airs were soon dispelled, and I found them laughing, gay or solemn in the natural, easy manner of their lives. These photographic indulgences gradually unveiled to me their ancient manners and modes. Eleventh century poet-saint Milrepa's lines seemed to permeate my mind:

*I, an old man,  
am like a box full of poems. . .*

Their way was old, unchanged by the new, full of unintelligible beliefs, customs and traditions. But there was something which made you think of life lovingly. It was the face which drew me. There was a fascination in its delightful, irrepressible humanity. It reflected a people made up of real feelings, of flesh and blood, love, desire, repentance, pride and cowardice. I often think of noisy nomads in road building camps in Sikkim, always ready to drink, sing, or believe in a miracle. I can recall their humour, the lively open hearted laughter and graceful sense of the comical.

I visited monasteries on the slopes of mountains where tall prayer flags fluttered in the breeze. There was a gentle dignity on the faces of the monks, a look of peace and calm. A contemplative mood of peaceful study pervaded the lamasaries, and one wondered how it fitted into the pattern of ceaseless struggles of life today. Did it

signify freedom or escape from the cares of the world? Or could it mean a synthesis to tone down the violence and vulgarity that afflicts so much of present-day life. I remember one swarthy Tibetan with a sun burnt face and the swinging stride of a mountaineer. There was in him a pagan's love for the exuberance of life and nature, an unconscious organic acceptance of the conflicts of life. The sensuous animation of his laughing face seemed to reflect a herdmen's saying: "Hatred, greed and lust were the evils which chained man to the wheel of life. Without these one would have attained the Escape. These were therefore the very things of life, so why be shocked when you come across them in yourself and others."

The nomad and the lama seem to interweave the fabric of Tibetan life. Tibetan folk tales and sayings abound with the earthy wit and wisdom of this interaction.

*Anger is the greatest sin, patience the greatest virtue.*

*If I find no one to anger me,*

*How can I be inspired to meditate on patience?*

...

*When the mind is kept bound,*

*It endeavours to wander in ten directions,*

*When left free, it remains motionless.*

*I understand it is a baffling animal,*

*like the camel.*

The landscape of Tibet—its endless icy wastes, its mystery and grandeur—has held a magical fascination for the adventurous in every human. The rocky upper reaches of Spiti and Lahaul valleys have something of this intoxication. One comes across old structures, remote monasteries on the slopes of rugged mountains, where Himalayan blue poppies blossom and huge black birds hover in the sky. Broken walls of earth and stone fill you with a sense of awe and reverence. The atmosphere has a dream-like quality which is beyond time and eternity. These lines by Basho seem to fill the air:

*Ah! the grass and the wind*

*And here among these stones*

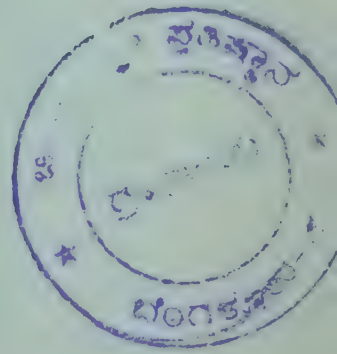
*The shadows of a dream.*

In the solitude of this icy wilderness man feels face to face with



the raw, elemental forces of nature. Here, perhaps, he finds meaning in the stone inscription found near the river Orchon: "When the blue sky came into being and below it came the dark earth, then appeared between them man." The spirit soars in awe and wonder to ask—what perhaps man should enquire many a time in life—what is it all about? The contrast with our world from which the tradition of solitude is fast disappearing could not be greater. A lama meditating in some high cave as if incarnates the individual, an antidote so much needed in an age obsessed with masses where a man becomes a formula, Huxley's alpha plus or beta minus. It was here among the lofty peaks that Milrepa wrote:

*In the solitary stony fastness, among  
the mountains  
there is a strange market where one  
can barter,  
the vortex of life for boundless bliss.*



There are many theories regarding the genesis of the Tibetan race. Folk tales speak of a monkey who was a protege of Avalokitesvara, the patron God of Tibet. This monkey was sent by his patron God to fulfil himself by meditation in the land of snow. A mountain ogress, in the form of a beautiful woman, came to seduce him. But as no female charm could prevail against the sanctity of the monkey recluse, she resorted to a woman's cunning. She threatened that because she was left with no alternative but to marry a demon, she would breed generation after generation of ogres and ogresses who would prey on every living creature in the land of snow. The monkey succumbed to compassion and married the mountain ogress. The children of the saintly monkey and the voluptuous demoness became the inhabitants of Tibet. They inherited the virtues of fortitude, piety, charity, diligence, love for goodness, gentle speech and eloquence from their father, and the vices of greed, love for trade, lust, obstinacy, frivolousness, bad temper and discourteousness from their mother. This is the reason, a smiling Tibetan may explain, why the people of the hallowed land of Tibet are no better or worse than people elsewhere.

Notwithstanding an element of the ubiquitous in this, it cannot be denied that life has a different quality with different races and

groups of people. Perhaps the physical environments go a long way in not only shaping peoples' physical appearance, but also their character, philosophy, and art—the interior life of a man. Under the clear sky and sparkling sun of Tibet, man spent his time in the open air. The physical necessities of existence impelled him in a state of conflict with the forces of nature. He was forced by the very conditions of existence to face hazards and to live dangerously, and to accept it as a way of life. He adopted a simple, carefree approach which wove the elemental life processes into a harmonious fabric and lent an organic unity to existence. For Tibetans, therefore, it has been possible to be happy. Their life has retained an earthy organic quality, uncorrupted either by the fragmentation of industrial individualism or by the dead-weight of religion. Their faces have an easy, soft dignity which perhaps comes with a sense of inward peace and contentment.

One may wonder about this matter of happiness. It seems not so much a question of social structures, systems of governments or organised religion, as perhaps a natural sense of involvement in the aesthetical, the beautiful. Peace does not lie in the stimulation of the purely intellectual, but perhaps in the aesthetical enrichment of that part of a man's being which is not dependent on discursive intellect, to that which is organic and inborn, and therefore more permanently enduring. Aesthetics appeal to the temperament, and it is the individual temperament whose subtle and resistless power endows passing events with their meaning and creates the moral-emotional atmosphere, the world as the individual recognises it. One cannot but feel concerned at the fate of Tibetans uprooted from their home land. The culture and traditions of a people are vital forces which shape man's likes and dislikes, thoughts, feelings, decisions and actions, though he may be unconscious of them. They make up his heart, the interior world of man whose individual roots go back to his infancy, and whose social roots go back for hundreds of years in the tradition to which he belongs. Happiness and contentment is perhaps primarily a question of equilibrium between the world by which a man is surrounded and the world which he carries in his heart.

It is often amazing to hear a Tibetan refugee talking hopefully of returning to his homeland despite heavy odds. Perhaps it has something to do with his system of looking at things—his mental world view. A Buddhist looks upon everything in the cosmos—both



physical beings and actions—as though in a state of perpetual flux, hurrying through ceaseless and countless changes which may be summarised as birth and death or beginning and end. Neither a man nor an amoeba, a house, a government, a social movement, a sea nor a mountain, can escape these processes. To be permanent, according to the Buddhists' definition, is to be both perpetual and unchangeable without beginning or end. Since nothing is like that, everything is impermanent.

The life of Tibetan nomads has changed very little over the centuries. Clad in bulky, raw sheep skins they roam the northern plateau with their flocks, and many die without ever seeing what a village looks like. They have a bronze complexion, a sturdy figure and a noble bearing—often bearing a striking resemblance to the American Red Indians. Women plait their hair into many tiny braids which are then bundled into a big one below the nape and adorned artistically with red and yellow stones. Some cover their hair with a large cloth sewn all over with silver and brass coins and shells. In a Sikkim road camp, a woman had her hair in tiny plaits tied to a strip of red and green cloth which hung down from her shoulders to the ground and was ornamented with coral and turquoise, Chinese and Indian coins . . . and a row of trouser buttons!

Nomads are sturdy, well-fed people, the food from their livestock being plentiful. Their sheep and yak provide them with proteins, and they have fat in the form of butter tea. For carbohydrates they eat barley. They live a spacious life with a self-contained economy. They are happy souls. Their way of life provides easy social companionship, the delights of the exercise of their simple crafts, and a simplification of the objects of life brought about by their attitude to religion.

Tibetans have a remarkable sense of colour. Their use of shades of red with black and orange is amazingly effective, and women's dresses have a characteristic grace. They have been modelled for centuries to complement the shape of their Mongolian figures, to hide legs which are short and breasts which are small, and emphasise the neck and face which are often very beautiful. The social intercourse and conversation in the upper classes has a formal atmosphere. Formality can be abominable when it is an empty shell but, as with Tibetans, where there is real feeling behind it, that feeling and warmth can be made more significant by being enclosed in a formal pattern; just as movement can be made more significant when turned

into a dance, or sound when composed in the pattern of music.

Family names are a rarity among the Tibetans. For the most part, they bear luck-bringing designations taken from Buddhist terminology such as Tsering meaning 'Long life', Tashi 'Luck', and Dorje 'Thunderbolt'. These are often combined with the name for their birthday. Lhamo 'Goddess', Dolma 'Redemptress', Yudronma 'Turquoise lamp', Chungma 'Little one' are popular women's names. These names are frequently in striking contrast to the real appearance or character of their bearers. A miserable beggar may answer to the name Tashi Norbu meaning 'Lucky gem,' or a weak minded muleteer call himself Tsering Yeshe or 'Long lived wisdom'. A robber whose one ear had been cut off by Tibetan justice on account of his misdeeds was called Gewe Gyepo meaning 'King of Virtue', while a lady of the street bore the name Tsutrim Lhamo—'Goddess or morality'.

There is no Tibetan equivalent for 'fair sex'. Indeed women are called 'lower beings' since they are considered to be the personification of carnal pleasure. They belong to a lower order, but in the lower field of worldly pleasure women need suffer no inhibitions. They are courted and they flirt before their own husbands. They are play-things, but at the same time they play with others. They play with their own men, they play with monks, they have even played with a few saints—to the latter's ruin. An incarnate Lama had once cried 'Woman is woe'. Milrepa has this to say on the renunciation of a bride:

*At first a wife is a Goddess wreathed  
in smiles,  
and her husband never tires of gazing  
at her face.*

*• She soon becomes a fiend with corpse-  
like eyes,  
if he casts a reproach she gives two in  
return,  
if he takes her by the hair she has him  
by the leg,  
if he strikes with a stick she beats him  
with a ladle.*

*In the end she becomes a toothless old  
hag,  
and her fiendish look of anger preys  
upon the mind.*



*I have renounced such a devilish scold,  
and I do not want a maiden bride.*

The majority of Tibetans live in monogamous marriage. Polygamy is very rare, existing only among a few noble families. Polyandry is prevalent in many forms, and is due to the peculiar economic conditions of Tibet. The limited cultivable land forced people to form economic units which had a better chance of survival than small independent families. If the land holdings were divided among all the male heirs, the resulting parcelling would be uneconomically small. This problem is solved by the simple procedure of the sons of a family marrying a joint wife. If economic circumstances permit, one or the other brother marries another woman later. The question of which of the joint husbands is actually the father of the children in a polyandrous marriage does not worry Tibetans. The eldest brother assumes the position of father of the family, though he is sometimes ousted by a more energetic younger brother.

A form of marriage that occurred in the provinces of Central Tibet is the 'Chamedung'—the cross beam marriage—as the Tibetans call it. This involved a young nobleman from Shintse marrying a lady twenty years his senior, and his father also marrying the same woman. In spite of the great difference in ages the marriage was considered to be very happy. However in another incident of such a self-imposed Oedipus situation, things did not work out so well. A widower father decided to take a wife. The wife came from a very rich family and brought considerable dowry, but she came on one condition. She did not wish her husband's son to marry a girl from outside lest one day she should be deprived of all property at her husband's death. The son was made to call off his engagement and to marry her instead. For some time the arrangement worked well, but later the father seemed to be taking advantage of the bargain, and there were rumours about the son brewing a revolution.

Marital connections can create strange relationships in Tibet. These of course occur only in the upper classes. The famous Tsarong Shape, who had risen from being the commander of the bodyguard to generalissimo of the Tibetan Armed Forces and finally became the Prime Minister, was the first husband of a celebrated lady—Mary la. She was not Tsarong Shape's only wife, for he was simultaneously married to two of her sisters also. Tsarong Shape and Mary la had a daughter named Betty la. In due course of time Betty la was married

to a brother of her mother's second husband. This introduced a certain amount of complexity in their relationships, for she was now the sister-in-law of her mother and her step-father. Tibetans who are accustomed to find monogamy, polygamy and polyandry existing side by side, did not find this a particularly unusual situation. One gets the impression that in Tibet, with a little effort, one could become one's own grandfather!

It appears that perhaps monogamy, polygamy, and polyandry are not the right words for describing the marital oddities of Tibet. Deliberate, common practical sense seems to underly all these forms of alliances. Property—how to preserve it, how to avoid its being divided up, and how to increase it—is apparently at the base of all such alliances. Almost all forms of matrimony are permissible as long as they further family interests.

**B**uddhists of Tibet have been great thanatologists—great students of death. They have been preoccupied with Nirvana—the problem of escaping from the flux of becoming in order to attain the ineffable serenity of being—and they have been able to study death with the objective, unemotional neutrality of a technologist. To them death has not been a harrowing mystery but only a problem.

Christian belief in only one life often leads to an overall tense, strained, hectic outlook. There is only one Time and Time is short and Time is flying. Time presses and a single never to be repeated life—youth—runs through your fingers like pearls dropped irredeemably into an abyss. Loves and hates swell to the size of irremovable mountains. Virtue adorns the soul like a flashing sword, and sin weighs it down like a lump of granite. Everything is unique, final, immense. Finally death presents itself, not as a stage in a journey, but as the end, and event of outstanding terrifying importance. The life of an individual is thus full of care and responsibility of the present, free from any encumbrances of past lives and times. There is freedom of action, and in the same life one's deeds can be salutary or harmful or actually fatal to the eternal principal within. Finally, death cuts short the processes of becoming, and hence-forward the past is congealed and irremediable. Sin inexorably claims its punishment. Earthly life is followed by the judgement, and beyond that is eternity. The individual makes a single appearance on the



stage of life, to which there is no return. "You only live once" as popular wisdom puts it. You only die once too.

On the other hand, the Tibetan belief in reincarnation, in a succession of lives, seems to imply that while life is not too long it is not too short either. It leads to an outlook more grandiose and less dramatic, to a broader and cooler picture of the universe. It is a calming, pain-destroying picture, full of time and patience, at once more serene and logical. Life is not so much an episode as a state. It is theoretically a provisional state, but a provisional state that lasts for an untold number of centuries. The cosmic life of man could, as a theoretical minimum, consist of one terrestrial life only, but in ordinary cases it consists of innumerable successive lives. Death is, therefore, not a tragic supreme culmination, a single fearful event, a crucial moment, from which there is no return. It is, like life, an experience that is repeated at certain intervals. It is a transition to which one must become accustomed; it is a process as natural as the sunset at the end of a day.

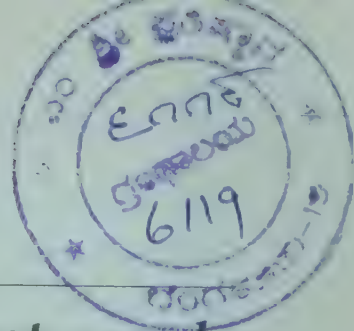
Tibet is presumably leading towards great changes. From the new information bulletins and papers coming out of Tibet one reads a lot about new "scientific" methods being put to use. It is also perhaps undeniable that the old feudalistic order of Tibet was over-ripe for a change. But one can only watch with the greatest apprehension the results of a forced, over-paced and spurious industrial age coming to Tibet, and the effects on the total personality, on the quality of its emotional-organic life fabric. It is paradoxical to see in the affluent techno-scientific age of today's world, where the mechanics of life, food, shelter and clothing, have become easier than ever before, that man should get more and more obsessed with the material things. Increasingly he seems to be getting caught in the mad cycle of producing, earning, consuming and spending. And he exhibits less and less concern for the contemplative and aesthetic aspects of his being.

A new generation is coming of age in the so-called under-developed countries as a result of their efforts at rapid industrialisation. Often the new man presents an alarming narrowness of vision. He discards all tradition with a flat indifference, and looks at the world with the fanatic zeal of a new convert, dividing everything sharply into black and white. That human life finds its course all through in the intermediate shades of grey is apparently beyond his understanding. He has no inclination for this sort of

comprehension, nor has he the inner discipline or patience for contemplation. He is the product of the dis-equilibrium of an age where science offers one picture of the universe and the traditional religion another, and the individual fails to find a synthesis.

Man has submerged himself in a violence of action which only signifies the fragmentation of his creative spirit. He lives not as a condition independent of deliberate activities, but only, if ever, in the interstices of action. Humour and laughter—free, melodious, open-hearted laughter—are the first casualties. Depth and contemplation go next. Man searches for peace as ever, but the extrovert violence of his activities does not lead him anywhere significant. Today the physical sciences have perhaps advanced a long way ahead of the social sciences, understanding, education and cultivation of the mind. One seems to forget, a red robed Tulku may remind with a gentle smile, the primary origin—the first cause of all—the soul, the mind, the beginning of awareness. One would be sad to see the Tibetans lose the articulate organic quality of their life.





## *Innovation and Originality: In the Literature and Philosophy of Ancient Alexandria*

**H**istorically, the intellectual role of Alexandria represents a latter phase of the culture of the ancient world. Her history occupied a good part of a millenium commonly known as the Hellenistic and Roman periods (323 BC–AD 642). She flourished in an area where older and greater civilisations had passed their peaks in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Greece; and yet Alexandria most ably, managed to score a lasting mark in the history of human civilisation. A full understanding of the Alexandrian achievement and of the foundations upon which it stood, is not a simple task as there are still many gaps in our knowledge and certain details continue to be controversial.<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of the present study, however, we may indicate that the foundation of Alexandria in 331 BC took place at a turning point in the history of the world. Alexander of Macedon had at that time embarked upon his unprecedented campaign to conquer the world. His conquests into Europe, Asia and Africa were coupled with a serious desire for exploration which had far-reaching consequences. He commissioned many expeditions to report on distant regions of the then unknown parts of the world. Although his dream to set up a world-state did not materialise due to his untimely death, yet the reports of those expeditions survived and later on motivated an unprecedented activity of scientific investigation of the earth. In fact a renaissance of human culture had started and it was on the wave of that crucial time in history, that the Library and the Mouseion as a research centre, saw the light in Alexandria.

Soon after Alexander's death, his empire was partitioned among his generals who eventually set up independent kingdoms. There arose among them a feverish rivalry; each one wished his kingdom to be the greatest as well as the most prestigious in learning and in culture. Outstanding in this respect were the Ptolemies of Egypt, the

Seleucids of Syria and the Attalids of Pergamon who set about achieving cultural supremacy by the establishment of libraries in their respective capitals.

The institution of libraries is a very old one and it is well known that all ancient and medieval civilisations had their great libraries in Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, Syria, Greece, Rome and the Islamic world. Unfortunately all of them have perished beyond redemption due to the passage of time and its vicissitudes. But from what we know, there is no doubt that the most famous among them all was the ancient library of Alexandria for, not only was it the largest in all antiquity, but it was also associated with a remarkable movement of scientific research so that scholars flocked to it from all over the Mediterranean. Even after its disappearance with the decline of the ancient world, it continued to survive in the memory of medieval authors, just as its fate continues to be a debated question among scholars to this day. The reason for this extraordinary interest is that the Library and its twin research institute, the Mouseion, were the chief representatives of the civilisation of their time and held up the banner of international scholarship and learning for more than seven centuries throughout the then known world.

The date of its foundation was c. 295 BC when Ptolemy I appointed Demetrius of Phaleron, a former pupil of Aristotle, to be in charge of the twin institutions, the Library and the Mouseion. From the earliest reports we know that Demetrius had at his disposal a large budget in order to collect, "all books in the world" in accordance with the King's wishes whose aim was to reach a total of half-a-million manuscripts. The Ptolemaic kings were indefatigable in their efforts to amass manuscripts and fabulous stories are told of the lengths to which they would go to reach their goal.<sup>2</sup> One report has it that all passengers who sailed into Alexandria were searched for any books they had, and if one was found that was not in stock in the Library, it was confiscated. Another report tells how Ptolemy II was able to deceive the Athenian authorities when he borrowed, against a large amount of silver as surety, the original manuscripts of the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. He kept the originals and sent back carefully made copies and, of course, forfeited his pledge. However, the usual procedure was to purchase books from the famous marts of Athens, Rhodes and other Mediterranean cities and soon the bulk of classical Greek works was believed to have been amassed at Alexandria.<sup>3</sup>



But the universal library that was envisaged also had, "to contain the writings of all nations", foremost among which were the Egyptian "sacred records" which Manethon, the Egyptian priest, familiar with Greek, had compiled. Also Berossos, a Chaldean priest wrote a history of Babylonia in Greek, while Hermippus, a pupil of Challymachus, wrote a book "in two million lines" on Zoroastrianism which infers that records of the Persian Mazdean faith were available in Alexandria. Buddhist writings would probably also be available as a result of the exchange of embassies between the Indian King Ashoka and Ptolemy II. Finally, the rapid Hellenization of the large Jewish community in Alexandria and Egypt, rendered the translation of the Pentateuch into Greek a practical necessity. The result was the Septuagint which has survived as the most valuable work in the history of all translations. Thus, books upon books were acquired and translated and within half a century, the Royal Library proved too small, so Ptolemy III (246–221 BC) decided to attach to the newly rebuilt Serapeum a branch library known as the Daughter Library. The average number of books collected were about half a million, although seven hundred thousand has also been mentioned.<sup>4</sup>

As regards the Mouseion, it followed the well-known basic pattern of the two famous Athenian philosophic schools, the Academy of Plato and the Lyceum of Aristotle. The name "Mouseion" is rather significant, as a shrine of the Muses was a customary feature of the Athenian philosophic schools. It was a common belief to attribute philosophic and artistic inspiration to the Muses and sometimes even scientific, as Vitruvius claimed, quoting the story of Pythagoras who believed that he would not have made a certain mathematical discovery, had it not been for the inspiration of the Muses to whom he sacrificed and gave thanks.<sup>5</sup> The combination of science and literature was indeed best represented at the Lyceum as it was to become later on at the Mouseion of Alexandria. The layout of the Mouseion is described by Strabo in the following words, "It was part of the royal palaces, it had a walk *peripatos*, an arcade *exedera* and a large house in which was a refectory for the members. They formed a community who held property in common with a priest appointed by the kings (and under the Empire by Caesar) in charge of the Mouseion."<sup>6</sup> The presiding priest underlined the religious character of the institution.

Although Strabo called the Mouseion a *synodos* (community) sharing communal property and enjoying a certain degree of



autonomy in running its own affairs, it was in fact in no way a free association of scholars. On the contrary, the impression we have is that it was a 'royal' society in the very strict sense of the word. Membership depended on the King's approval; admittedly, scholars enjoyed a high degree of liberty and every facility of research in the pursuit of their scholarly work, nevertheless they were fully aware that they were on "His Majesty's Service" and that the continuation of their work and pension depended solely and entirely on the King's pleasure. We know that during the civil war between Ptolemy VI and his younger brother Euergetes II in the second century BC, the latter's acts of persecution included members of the Mouseion who were forced to flee the country in vast numbers. Menecles of Barca tells us that Alexandrian scholars in their diaspora, educated both Hellenes and Barbarians alike in every branch of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

The Mouseion was basically a research centre and no regular teaching is reported to have taken place on the premises under the Ptolemies. And yet we frequently read in the biographies of scholars that they were teachers or pupils of one or the other of the eminent members of the Mouseion. This can be explained by the practice of enlisting promising young men as research assistants. Thus Apolonius of Perge is said to have been "a pupil in Alexandria of the pupils of Euclid." In medicine, there seems to have developed a form of apprenticeship connected with the clinics of distinguished masters. Public teaching in the form of lectures and symposia, occasionally attended by the King, may also have taken place and it is generally believed that teaching gradually increased with time. In spite of the fact that by the end of Ptolemaic rule in Egypt and the arrival of the Romans, scholarship tended to be on the decline, yet Alexandria still continued to offer the best academic training available in the ancient world.<sup>8</sup>

With the founding of the Mouseion and the Library, the right approach to academic research on a sound basis was established in Alexandria; the time was now ripe for new developments in the human experience. It is true great heights had already been reached that could hardly be surpassed, especially in the epic, drama and philosophy but in other fields, namely in linguistics as well as in literary and scientific studies, the case was different for those studies could not be effectively pursued without prolonged and sustained scholarship. Such scholarship was only possible under the patronage of the rival Hellenistic monarchs. Due to the conscious awareness of the importance of books and libraries, the Hellenistic civilisation has



been disparagingly described as bookish, but fortunately recent studies have revealed that there is a great deal of originality in much of the work accomplished by the pioneers of the third and second centuries BC. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that for the first time, the principles of a scientific method of research were developed in various disciplines with impressive results in mathematics, physics, medicine, geography, astronomy, etc. as well as in textual criticism. The wealth of books at the disposal of these scholars was a necessary tool in their hands, and what a tool that was, which for the first time combined the experience of both classical Greece and the ancient near East! But more important was the critical attitude taken by the earlier Alexandrian scholars towards these books, for no written authority however great was accepted on trust, their final judgement relied only on experiment, on mathematical proof and on arguments based on evidence.

Indeed, great research had already been done in former civilisations, but there is little doubt that as a result of Alexander's global adventure, the world found itself standing on the threshold of a new intellectual experience of which Alexandria was its chief representative. The Alexandrian scholars who excelled in academic achievements in a number of fields are well known, e.g. Euclid in geometry and mathematics; Archimedes, Ktesibius and Hiero in engineering and mechanics; Herophilos and Galen in medicine; Aristarchus of Samos, Eratosthenes and Ptolemy in astronomy and geography; Zenodotos, Aristarchus (of Samothrace) and Aristophanes in literary studies.<sup>9</sup> In the present paper, however, we shall confine ourselves to two fields only in which alexandria made its own characteristic contribution, namely in literature and philosophy. The one flourished under the patronage of the Ptolemaic kings and with their encouragement, while the other blossomed in response to the conditions that prevailed under the Roman empire. It is characteristic, however, that work in these two fields, as in others, was markedly the result of the availability on the spot of a universal library and the guidance of the principles of scholarship ensconced by the Mouseion.

**T**he supremacy of Alexandria in literature is indicated by the fact that the term "Alexandrian" has been applied to Greek poetry composed between c. 300–30 BC, for Alexandria, due to her Library and Mouseion, seemed to be the literary capital of the

Greek world. Given the scholarly background of Alexandria, the new poets perceived that the great Athenian literature of the fifth century was so much the product of a particular time and place, that to imitate it would be futile. Consciously, therefore, they sought to be original and turned to earlier narrative and lyric verse which they were able to evolve along new, unexplored lines. They created two new forms destined to survive for very long; one was the epigram which developed from an inscription piece into a short poem expressing one simple emotion, in particular love; the other was the extension of the elegiac couplet from mournful themes to narrative of any kind. Through the vehicle of these forms they indefatigably sought subjects that were new or capable of being treated from a new angle in a language that, while retaining the flavour of antiquity, showed at every turn some novelty of formation, shade of meaning or collocation. The emphasis was on polish of style, *lepton*, i.e. subtlety, as well as on a show of erudition and learning, *polymathes*.<sup>10</sup> From this period stem the most influential of the poets whose works have survived to this day; Callimachus of Cyrene, Theocritus of Syracuse and Appolonius of Rhodes (Rhodius).

Callimachus was considered the most distinguished and the most celebrated poet of his time. Early in his life he came to Alexandria where at first he taught at the suburb of Eleusis. When still 'a young man', Philadelphus in recognition of his encyclopedic erudition appointed him to the task of composing a critical guide of the contents of the Library. The result of his effort was the *Pinakes* (Register) which has only survived in fragments but which earned for its author the title of "Founder of Librarianship."<sup>11</sup> But it was in poetry that he excelled above all. Among all Alexandrian poets, Callimachus was the scholar-poet *par excellence* and the best preserved of his works are the *Hymns* and the *Aitia* (Causes or Origins). The *Hymns* are poems addressed to individual gods; of them six are extant: to Zeus, Apollo, Artemis, Delos (the sacred island of Apollo), Demeter and the Bath of Pallas.<sup>12</sup> They offer a series of anecdotes or *genre* scenes, elegantly presented and occasionally spiced with a wry humour far removed from the simple faith and devotion found in the older Homeric *Hymns* of which they may remind us. The *Aitia* or *Actia* became known to the modern world in a papyrus discovered in Egypt in 1893.<sup>13</sup> It is a long poem in four books that deals with the local legends of Greece in which for the first time Callimachus used the elegiac metre for the purpose of narration.



The great subjects of the classical age are avoided while the poet concentrates on a series of anecdotal details that almost belong to the realm of folklore. Variety seems to be the rule with no broad guideline theme running through the whole work. Callimachus rejected all work on a grand scale, he preferred brevity with discreet, perfect minutiae, or as he himself declared, "the narrow path to the highway."<sup>14</sup> Among his other surviving works, are sixty epigrams in which he reveals himself at his best. Here, with a great deal of spontaneity, he expresses his personal passions and feelings. The following epigram reiterates his "literary faith":

*The song that other men have sung,  
Familiar now to every tongue,  
I loath their old refrain.*

*The spring wherefrom the vulgar sip,  
Shall never pass within my lip,  
I spit it forth again.<sup>15</sup>*

Callimachus' nearest composition to what can be called an 'epic' poem, is the *Hekalê* (also discovered on a papyrus in Egypt in 1893) which delineates the myth of Theseus and the bull of Marathon, in a succession of brief sketches presented in an exquisitely intimate manner.

The other great literary figure was Apollonius Rhodius who was believed to have been born in Egypt. He studied under Callimachus and later distinguished himself as a leading scholar-poet in the reign of Philadelphus when he was appointed chief librarian and tutor to Ptolemy III, Euergetes. He acquired the designation "of Rhodes" later in his life when he went to Rhodes in self-imposed exile after the famous quarrel with his former teacher, Callimachus. The quarrel arose around the full-scale epic *Argonautica* which Apollonius composed in defiance of Callimachus' fundamental principles. The *Argonautica* is long (it covers four copious books) and has one principal grand theme, that of the legendary voyage of Jason and his companions to Kolchis in search of the Golden Fleece and their subsequent return after numerous adventures.<sup>16</sup> Although the debt to Homer is quite obvious, especially in language and imagery, yet the heroes of the *Argonautica* are much more down-to-earth and less grandiose than their Homeric forebears;

they inhabit a natural world that has been closely observed and brilliantly delineated. Their emotions are equally described from the human angle whilst maintaining their complexity or strength. The epic may lack a certain Homeric charm and unity of structure, yet its episodes unquestionably have great merit notably those dealing with the love of Jason and Medea. After its first reading in Alexandria, Callimachus the domineering arbiter of literary fashion, was deeply offended and launched a relentless attack on Apollonius. With obvious reference to the *Argonautica* he pronounced the dictum that "A big book is a great evil" and he further expounded that "Great is the stream of the Assyrian river (Euphrates) but much filth of earth and much refuse it carries on, in its waters."<sup>17</sup> Apollonius was aggravated and retaliated with the well-known epigram:

*Blockhead, Old Bogey, Housewives' slush  
That's what I call Callimachus.  
His "Causes" lie upon my shelf;  
Cause of my curses he himself.*<sup>18</sup>

Infuriated, Callimachus composed a whole poem on Apollonius, the *Ibis* which we only know in Ovid's adaptation. Apollonius found life in Alexandria intolerable after that, and retired to Rhodes where he was well received by the Rhodians and where he revised the *Argonautica* more than once. After the death of Callimachus in 235 BC there is a report that he returned to Alexandria where he eventually died and where his body was laid in a State tomb next to Callimachus.<sup>19</sup>

The third great figure, Theocritus, was born in Syracuse and after a sojourn at Cos was received in Alexandria under the patronage of Philadelphus at the same time as Callimachus and Apollonius. Although he shared with his contemporaries the same Alexandrian characteristics, yet he is generally considered more original due to his creation of the form of pastoral poetry. The ten pastoral poems that have come down to us are distinguished by a genuine sensitivity towards nature hardly equalled in all classical literature. They are permeated with the atmosphere of the Sicilian countryside which they have immortalised. Although Theocritus draws upon his personal experience as well as upon his erudition, yet by his simple straightforward style, he was always able to subordinate learning to poetry. His other idylls and poems deal with a variety of topics: ancient legends, panegyrics, love, dramatic sketches and epigrams.



It is in the dramatic sketches that Theocritus once more outshines his contemporaries for in them he combines realism and graphic descriptions of scenes from city life, with a delightful humour and wit. He observed the numerous dialects with which the various immigrants in Alexandria spoke, and in a poem to commemorate the festival of Adonis he depicts, in a well-known passage, an amusing incident in which a man in the crowd makes fun of two garrulous women from Syracuse by mimicking their speech: "You stupid women, can't you stop your endless burbling like pigeons! You get on my nerves with all those slurred vowels." One of the women flares up and proudly boasts that they are Syracusans and Corinthians by extraction "like Bellerephon himself" and that their speech is Peleponnesian. She adds, "I suppose Dorians may speak Dorian. . . If we don't measure up to *your* standards, so much the worse for you!"<sup>20</sup>

These three masters were highlights of the Alexandrian school of poetry, but there were many others, contemporaries as well as successors down to the first century BC who maintained, with varying degrees of success, the literary principles formulated by the great masters. The literary modes and forms of this school spanned the entire Mediterranean and its influence was particularly strong during the golden age of Latin literature. Alexandrianism became fashionable in Rome in the last century of the Republic and under the early Empire when Alexandrian literary models were translated, adapted and imitated. This is reflected in the *Bucolics* of Virgil, the love poems of Catullus, the epigrams of Propertius and Ovid's *Amores* and *Metamorphoses*.

**A**lthough philosophy did not flourish in general under the Ptolemies yet towards the close of the dynasty, in the first century BC there was a definite growing interest in it. This was presumably in response to prevailing conditions at the time which facilitated the flow of religious ideas and beliefs from one land to another, as well as to certain tendencies among intellectuals around the Mediterranean, that grew in momentum with the expansion of the Roman Empire. For it had become customary among intellectuals and members of the upper classes to adhere to one of the two popular philosophies of the day, Stoicism and Epicurianism. Other older philosophical schools enjoyed various

degrees of popularity; thus there were Academicians, Peripatetics, Sceptics, Cynics and Neo-Pythagorians.

This tendency was best represented in Alexandria by Antiochus of Ascalon (d. c. 68 BC) who according to Cicero was a staunch upholder of the old Academy, in opposition to the ever growing sceptic tendency of the Middle and New Academy, with regard to the theory of knowledge. In so doing Antiochus adhered to the Platonic tripartite division of philosophy into logic (i.e. theory of knowledge, epistemology), physics and ethics. He also maintained the three-fold scheme in ethics by asserting that the "*ends of goods finis bonorum*" was to attain "complete accordance with nature in mind, body and life."<sup>21</sup> Another feature of Antiochus' philosophy was eclecticism, i.e. the blending together of different strains of thought. Although a professed Academician, he was anxious to connect and emphasize the similarity between Plato and Aristotle; he furthermore incorporated certain elements of stoic morals, human partnership and all-pervading Reason. This blending of the three major philosophies was to have a far-reaching influence on the development of Neo-Platonism.<sup>22</sup>

The fusion of the various religious beliefs with philosophic eclecticism had a profound impact on many a religious conscience and sensitive mind under the Roman Empire. In Alexandria, however, two main reactions are recognisable, one developed within the religious thought of the Jews and of the Christians afterwards, the other was formulated by the pagan philosophers. The Jewish philosopher Philo (c. AD 40) is considered the precursor of the Judaeo-Christian school of thought for he was both a staunch believer in the Holy Scriptures as well as a great admirer of Greek philosophy as it had developed in Alexandria at the time. Yet he was also alarmed by young, educated Jews who were attracted to the philosophic schools and abandoned Judaism. In order to combat this tendency, he employed a new approach of interpreting the Jewish faith philosophically. To achieve this, he fell back upon the prevailing eclectic method derived from the various schools, but he mainly drew upon an Alexandrian blend of Platonism and Stoicism already formulated a century earlier by Antiochus. This can be seen quite clearly in his idea with regard to God, where the Stoic doctrine of the effluences of God (Logos) that permeate the world, served him as a model. The highest wisdom is the attainment of "heavenly wisdom" which can be achieved when we transcend all terrestrial and mortal



attachments and, in a state of ecstasy, receive the higher illumination into ourselves. This illumination is produced by the influx of the invisible divine "spirit", the cosmic force that proceeds from God to man. In this way Philo moved away from philosophy to mysticism.<sup>23</sup>

Yet Philo's main contribution was not to philosophy but to the study of theology, Judaic as well as Christian. By the beginning of the third century, Christianity had grown into a powerful movement which constituted a threat already felt by the imperial government. It had its own teachers and school in open challenge to the pagan Mouseion and its affiliated philosophic school. One of its early great scholars was Origen (AD 185–252), who was born in Alexandria of Christian parents and in AD 203 became head of the Christian school. He was a senior contemporary of Plotinus and was equally exposed to the influences of philosophic and gnostic teachings prevailing in Alexandria at the time. In order to better understand pagan thought, he attended the Neo-Platonic lectures of Ammonius Saccas and also visited Rome. As a biblical scholar, he followed the characteristic Alexandrian method of textual criticism. In his study of the Old Testament, he compared the original Hebrew text with four Greek translations, one of which was the Septuagint. This was followed by a study of the New Testament. His commentary testifies to his vast knowledge and extensive reading of earlier works. He based his understanding on the belief that the Scriptures had three senses: the literal, the moral and the spiritual which he compared to the body, the soul and the spirit. These three senses call to mind the triadism of the Neo-Platonists as well as the tripartite division of philosophy into physics, ethics and logic. He furthermore illustrated the spiritual with the allegorical method of interpretation, well known in stoicism.<sup>24</sup>

Fundamental religious issues were not confined to Jews and Christians alone, they appear to have dominated the entire intellectual environment. Under the influence of monotheistic tendencies, there grew a new, independent and very active movement known as Gnosticism which, during the first three centuries of the Empire, constituted a challenge to almost all other religions. It resented pagan religions and rejected the principle of revelation connected with monotheistic religions. It was a kind of religious philosophy that accepted belief in the existence of a supreme divine human being and was based on the mystic knowledge of that being. The attainment of true knowledge, namely knowledge of God and

the universe, was a gift from God, which could only be gained by special spiritual exercises and prolonged meditation.<sup>25</sup> In spite of its attraction for a certain type of contemplative individual, Gnosticism never became popular with the common people since it lacked the positive vigour that arouses the enthusiasm of the multitude; on the other hand, it also failed to attract the more sophisticated minds because it lacked the rigour and precise thinking necessary to a coherent philosophic system. It is not surprising either, that gnostics gradually turned into mystic Christians.

The full philosophic response to the religious situation was found in Neo-Platonism, the last phase in the history of ancient philosophy. This school of thought evolved out of the eclectic tendency which reached its zenith in the third century at the hands of Plotinus, the greatest representative of the Alexandrian school of philosophy. Plotinus was born in AD 204 at Lycopolis (Assiout) in Upper Egypt, he studied, like Origen, under Ammonius Saccas, the distinguished teacher of Platonic philosophy at Alexandria. Aware of and sensitive to the religious cross-currents converging and conflicting in the cosmopolitan city, he set himself to the challenging task of working out a philosophical system which would encompass the entire complexity of the religio-philosophic issue as it had developed in the third century. He was anxious to acquire the necessary qualifications for the task; in addition to his education in Egypt and Alexandria, in AD 243, he joined a Roman expedition to Persia, where he gained first-hand experience of Persian and Indian wisdom.

After the ultimate failure of the expedition, he hurried back to Antioch in AD 245, thence to Rome where he founded his own school at which he taught until his death in AD 270. We are assured by his pupils and biographer, Porphyrius, that his integrity, modesty, purity and ascetic behaviour had an everlasting impression upon his pupils and disciples.<sup>26</sup> In the formation of his doctrines, he depended primarily on Plato and the Neo-Pythagorians, yet multiple elements derived from the various earlier philosophies were also incorporated into his highly coherent, albeit very intricate system. Much of his teaching has been preserved in six groups of nine books called the *Enneades*. In its simplest terms, Plotinus' system is based upon the concept of the dualism of, and sharp contrast between, reason and matter, intelligibles and sensibles or, the supersensual and the phenomenal. In the supersensual there is God, the source of all being,



the First and Absolute One, unlimited and indivisible. From the First proceed the thought and the soul which have eternal timeless life. The sensual world, in contrast, is the realm of the divided and changeable; it is also evil, the primary evil. Nevertheless, matter is necessary; mind must become matter and the soul must bring forth the body as its abode. Since it is formed by the soul, the nature of things are as beautiful and perfect as a material world can be. Here we meet with evil matter and non-evil matter. Plotinus, accordingly, repudiates the contempt that Christian Gnostics had for nature.<sup>27</sup>

Finally we come to the mystic union or *unio mystica*. Since the soul belongs by nature to a higher world, its highest aim can only be to free itself from inclination towards the sensual. Thus for Plotinus, happiness consists of the perfect life, which in its turn consists of thought; in other words, the soul's first condition is to liberate itself from the body and all that is connected with it, in order to attain purification or *katharsis*. We finally attain the highest only, when we are completely buried in ourselves and when raised above thought in a state of unconsciousness, ecstasy and simplification, we are suddenly filled with divine light and become so directly one with the Primary Being that all differences between us and Him disappear. Plotinus is supposed to have attained that state of mystic union at least four times. But there are many problems in Plotinus' philosophy that we fail to understand. His strong belief in the Absolute One and his claim of divine union, often lead us to forget that he belonged to the pagan world and that he accepted the existence of lesser gods. He even blamed those who refused them the honour due to them, yet he would not go to the temple, "The gods must come to me, not I to them" he used to say.<sup>28</sup>

**W**hat happened to this great seat of learning at Alexandria and to the libraries that housed the half-a-million books? Available evidence proves that the Great Library, close to the harbour, was burned down accidentally during Caesar's Alexandrian War in 48 BC. The Daughter Library continued to satisfy the needs of scholars for four more centuries until it was destroyed, together with the Sarapeum in AD 391 in accordance with an imperial decree to crush down paganism. The twelfth century story that Amr, the Arab general, destroyed the Royal Library after his conquest of Egypt, is no longer credited and is probably a Medieval fabrication

propagated by supporters of the new regime of Saladin to justify his sale of the libraries of the Fatimids.<sup>29</sup>

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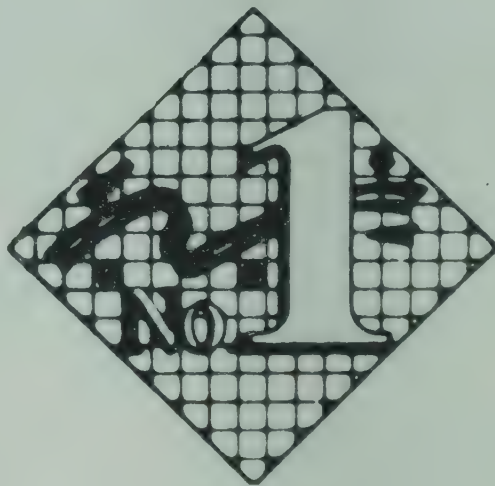
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## *Federalism in Switzerland*

**I**f Switzerland did not already exist, could it be invented? Looking at the 160 or so countries which share the globe today, we see that none of them has adopted a system like the Swiss type of federalism. The very idea of creating a nation from an area so riddled with diversity must appear absurd in the light of modern experience. Apart from some fine mountain scenery and a modest hydro-electric potential, the elementary components available for nation-building do not seem at all promising. The territory is uncomfortably small to be surrounded by major European powers. It has no access to the sea, no mineral wealth, but lots of poor farmland if not sheer rock. The formidable Alps cut right through it, virtually separating the Northern and Southern halves. A web of other barriers obstruct amalgamation: four languages, two rival Christian denominations, two different mentalities represented by the largely urban lowlanders and the rural highlanders, and finally the sheer fragmentation into two baker's dozens of political sub-units—the 26 cantons (member-states) and half-cantons—most of which have a history as independent mini-states and thus mirror the complex situation of which they themselves are the product. Add to this array of diverging tendencies the fact that there is not, and has never been, any clearly dominating centre which would galvanise all these forces; and you end up with a rather hopeless case for national aspiration.

A parallel of present-day Europe comes immediately to mind. Was it not largely the pressure of outside events happening on a much larger, global scale that pushed the Western European countries after the Second World War on to elaborate ways of cooperation, however reluctant many of their people felt about it? The burghers of the Swiss cantons must have had very similar feelings when they founded their Confederation in 1848. They did it

with the utmost hesitation, cautiously conferring a bare minimum of powers on the new central institutions and checking these by a control system which is probably the most uncommon aspect of Swiss Federalism. However, the federal set-up as such was largely inspired by the American model. Therefore, the Swiss cannot really accept credit for having invented their country, or even genuinely wanting to create it. They did it under pressure of outside realities, with grim determination, but a somewhat minimal commitment. The necessary feeling of a common bond stemmed from no more than a shared historical perspective, a cherished sense of freedom and a certain familiarity in dealing with one another in the compartmentalised confined mountain environment.

In describing Swiss federalism one can hardly stress too strongly that most of the modern cantons were once fully independent and sovereign political units. They arranged themselves in a sort of loose commonwealth by means of a bundle of defence agreements, mutual guarantees for domestic security, and by their common dislike for the surrounding monarchies. Their only central institution was a conference, convened alternately in one of the more important capitals, to deal with their own inter-communal quarrels, to administer the jointly occupied territories, and to succumb together to the temptation to conclude mercenary agreements with the French king or other monarchs. There was no unified army, no economic policy, not even a customs union. Foreign policy was also in the hands of the alliance partners, who would each send and receive Ambassadors, although they usually preferred to dispatch common delegates, since it was cheaper.

This state of affairs lasted from its embryonic beginnings in 1291 until Napoleon's troops overran the territory in 1798 and established the unitary Helvetic Republic. The innovation was a total failure, which five years later, even Napoleon had to admit when he provided for a large measure of decentralisation by means of a decree called the "Mediation Act". After Napoleon's death the Swiss reverted speedily to their original system of virtual cantonal independence. It was only with regard to foreign affairs that they had become a bit shrewder and this caused them to maintain joint diplomatic representations in Paris and Vienna.

During the following decades significant transformations in the direction of more immediate forms of democracy took place in many cantons. This trend finally aligned a sufficient number of the formerly



rather diverse states to such a degree that amalgamation into a confederation became a possibility. The birth of modern Switzerland took place during 1847–1848. The process was not without birth pains: a civil war erupted in the beginning, fortunately limited to about three weeks of fighting and leaving very few casualties behind. It broke up an alliance of seven Catholic cantons who were hostile to the proposed change. One can say that the political scars healed quite soon after.

**H**ow is federalism today embedded in the constitution? Article 1 defines Switzerland as a confederation consisting of the united peoples of the 26 sovereign cantons and half-cantons.\* A canton or half-canton is a member-state of the confederation and as such a self-governing entity fully equipped with a regional government, administrative apparatus, parliament and judiciary. Article 3 of the federal constitution spells out the guiding principle for defining the balance between cantonal sovereignty and central powers: the cantons are sovereign in so far as this sovereignty is not limited by the federal constitution, and they exercise all the powers which have not been conferred upon the confederation. Constitutionalists interpret this rule rather strictly in favour of cantonal powers by pointing out that the creation of central powers must be explicit and cannot be easily assumed by analogy.

A case in point is broadcasting. Whereas postal and telegraphic services are explicitly listed as federal matters, the newer media of radio and television are not. At first no cantonal government seemed to be interested in providing these services and the federal government somewhat automatically felt entitled to deal with them. True, a strong analogy exists between the postal services from which a wireless offshoot later developed, and the modern use of air waves for information or entertainment. The lack of a constitutional base handicaps secondary legislation (for instance, as to control over broadcasting—a problem really without parallel in the field of private communications). Uneasy feelings about this situation increased progressively in later times, yet attempts to grant an

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\* Three cantons are divided in half; each half occupies virtually the same place as an ordinary canton, the sole major exception being that it delegates only one representative to the Council of States and not two like full cantons.

outright broadcasting monopoly to the central government have been defeated so far by the "canton-minded" Swiss.

One could, therefore, say that "devolution" in Switzerland assumes the opposite direction from what it does in Britain, that is, from the cantons to Berne as against from London to the regions. The reluctance, however, with which devolution is considered seems to be just the same in both instances.

What are the principal powers of cantons and confederation respectively? Since the cantons are the keepers of all residual powers not explicitly mentioned as federal competences it is convenient to go through the list of federal matters. It includes, defence, foreign affairs, foreign economic affairs and customs, domestic economic affairs in certain fields such as labour relations, assistance to regional development, assistance to endangered trades or sectors, civil and criminal legislation, the major infrastructure of communications, social security and—as the most recent addition—a general control over nuclear energy. This seems an impressive range of state powers and makes one wonder, what can be left of the cantonal sovereignty which was in the main focus before. The competences remaining with the cantons are probably—on balance—less weighty, consisting mainly of education, health, culture, the administration of justice, police, utilities and environment. Actually, town planning, local traffic, recreation and the like, fall—strictly speaking—under communal authority, where they are as jealously guarded against cantonal encroachments as the cantons defend their rights *vis-à-vis* the confederation.

In whatever way one may assess these rather technical components of the power balance, there are yet other considerations of vital importance in this context. One is money. The cantons of their subdivisions (the communes) are sovereign tax masters as far as direct taxation is concerned. The federal government has only the tax powers from time to time allotted to it in periodic amendments to the constitution, besides the competence for indirect taxation and customs revenues. The latter having been drastically reduced in recent years owing to GATT, European free trade and preferences for developing countries, the federal government finds itself in a considerable financial squeeze, and there is little readiness on the part of the population to allot new tax sources to the confederation.

Another factor which demonstrates the weight of the cantons in the Swiss balance of powers has to do with their role in the democratic



process. This role is exercised through parliament or directly. The Federal Assembly (parliament) consists of two houses—very much like the American Congress—of which the Council of States represents the cantons, and the National Council the people. Whereas the people's representatives are elected after the proportional system, the "senators" (2 per canton and 1 per half-canton) are generally chosen by majority vote. As a result, the party spectrum in the Council of States is quite different—rather more conservative—from the one in the National Council. Although the States' representatives do not vote upon instructions from their canton's governments—an important change since the days of the old Swiss Diet before 1848—they probably consider themselves more as guardians of cantonal interests—than as agents for their parties.

The two houses have absolutely equal powers, so that a majority of the total Swiss population—can effectively influence, if not veto, national decisions. This circumstance is mirrored and probably enhanced by the fact that generally the allegiance of the Swiss to their parties goes in the first place to the cantonal party chapter. It makes party discipline as known in Westminster a very unlikely thing in Switzerland. To understand this better, one has to consider that any federal act which brings about or amounts to a change in the constitution must be confirmed by an obligatory popular referendum in which not only the majority of the voting electorate but also the results in each individual canton and half-canton—amounting to 23 cantonal votes—are decisive. By way of direct participation in federal politics, cantons may even assume functions which are normally held by parliament as a whole or its individual members. Cantonal governments have the right of initiative, that is the power of setting the legislative process on the highest, constitutional, level into motion; and they have the right of referendum, that is the power of submitting a generally binding act of parliament to a popular vote. The right of initiative may be exercised by each individual canton, while the right of referendum by at least eight cantons together. It is this participatory capacity which elevates the Swiss cantons above the position of mere regional authorities, as they are in fact influential partners in the area of national decision-making. The principle of cantonal co-determination in federal affairs is reflected even in the structure of the federal government. Here the Swiss departed again from the American model which otherwise served as the main reference. Executive powers are shared by a cabinet of seven members with

equal rank, of whom no two members may hail from the same canton—just to make sure that the weight is evenly distributed.

Yet another detail of cantonal sovereignty may be mentioned for its demonstrative value. It points at a very core aspect of sovereignty: citizenship. A Swiss is first of all a citizen of a commune and the respective canton. As long as this title is established he passes automatically as a Swiss national also, but not vice versa. This range of priorities illustrates emphatically what the Swiss understand by federalism.

Just to complete the picture one more point may be stated: it is firmly established in the Swiss system that—no matter how extensive the powers conferred upon the confederation—execution of these powers is generally left to the cantons. The only major exceptions, where federal employees are to be seen in the cantons, concern the postal services, the federal railways and customs and excise. Not counting a few less conspicuous cases like the personnel of federal research institutes, the two federal universities (there are eight cantonal ones) or the broadcasting establishments, the bulk of administrators as well as the judiciary of first and second instance are cantonal. It is generally thought in Switzerland that such a system palliates the possible harshness of centralisation.

**H**ow has Switzerland fared under this system during the 132 years since its introduction? In the eyes of outsiders, it seems, reasonably well. The Swiss appreciate it as being tailored to their needs in historical evolution. To them this system is the only one that appears natural in the given circumstances. In broad terms one can say that the identification of a Swiss with his canton is probably stronger than that with his country as a whole. The feeling of relatively greater influence in the cantonal context, where the issues affect a voter more immediately, gives him more satisfaction in the exercise of his political rights than is the case on the remoter federal level.

The most severe test so far of the federal principle took place in 1978 when—after years of unrest and even terror—by democratic process and with an unusually large and representative majority of popular and cantonal votes, a new canton, Jura, was created out of a linguistic minority region within the canton of Berne. It was an unprecedented exercise for which no detailed rules were already in



existence, and therefore the nation had to rely on its by now instinctive understanding of federalism. The method worked out for this occasion consisted of a cascade of three referendums: a cantonal one to secure the support of the remaining part of the canton of Berne, a regional one within the Jura mountains' communes to ascertain the borders of the future canton, and a federal one to underwrite the necessary change in the federal constitution. This procedure was seen as appropriate by the nation, and it did indeed bring about a clear result. If a small, dissatisfied faction is at present campaigning for an enlargement of the new canton's area, this had to be expected; it hardly detracts anything from the validity of the approach.

So, federalism "*à la suisse*" is practically uncontested by those who live under it. That does not mean, of course, that the Swiss are not aware of some inherent drawbacks. It is obviously not the most economical thing in the world to maintain 26 regional governments, parliaments, judiciaries, and their administrations in addition to the national set of these institutions. On the other hand, their respective functions are shared or complementary rather than in competition with each other, which takes considerable weight off the federal budget. Also, in the mostly small cantonal context, public services will often be rendered on an honorary basis. But what about time-efficiency, when 26 cantons participate in the nation's decision-making process? In this respect the time-consuming complications are primarily due to the involved nature of Swiss direct democracy with its regular referendums, and due also to the duplication of procedure in a strict bicameral parliament. The Swiss would probably not part with either of these features, even if cantonal autonomy were to be—for any unthinkable reason—greatly reduced.

The major drawback of such pronounced federalism is perhaps best exemplified by the present financial impasse in which the federal government finds itself. Their primarily cantonal outlook prevents the electorate and the politicians at times from fully comprehending the needs of a central government. In the field of revenue allocation, this state of mind finds very quantifiable expression.

Similarly unconstructive, if not petty, is the persistent failure to coordinate the school year between the cantons. Whatever the relative importance of the issues at stake, the so-called "*Kantönli-Geist*" (mentality of burghers in little cantons) can become a cult if not a refuge from reality. Is it surprising then that the nation, which views

its own central institutions often with secondary interest and always with a good deal of suspicion, has so far considered the question of joining the United Nations as by and large irrelevant? The UN issue is, of course, not a vital one for Switzerland at the moment. What counts is that the people inhabiting this small and geographically difficult territory have managed to integrate their heterogeneous communities into a state capable of staying on par with many a rival which was, from the outset, more evidently predestined to become a country in the modern sense. This achievement, as far as Switzerland is concerned, is largely due to an uncompromisingly federalistic approach.

At present, Swiss federalism as well as the typical Swiss form of direct democracy are undergoing a severe test of their compatibility with an integrated Europe along the lines of the European Economic Community. It may appear ironical that Switzerland finds it difficult to join a process which she had undergone herself in a very similar way—albeit on a smaller scale—150 years ago: the merger of comparatively vulnerable mini-states into a more balanced and competitive new entity.

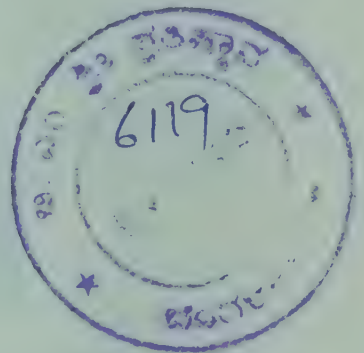
The crux of the matter is not so much the partial loss of sovereignty—for the time being restricted to economic matters—or the tricky technicalities involved in equating a mountain economy with the otherwise prevailing lowland patterns in Europe. What cuts deeply into the Swiss soul is the prospect of losing the rights of co-determination which Swiss cantons and the voting citizens have pioneered since 1848 and in which they are virtually unrivalled even today. If Switzerland is to join the EC, her government in Berne will have its share of influence and decision-making in the EC's political institutions. But in EC-matters there can be no question of one country holding up the legislative process because of its unique tradition of regularly submitting issues by referendum to the voters for their final verdict. The harsh reality is that the Swiss voter would have to give up between 15 and 30 per cent of his actual voting rights, corresponding to the share of the economic sector in all state matters.

For the citizens of Europe's archetypal republic which was surrounded by absolutist monarchies for the most part of its 700 years of confederate history, this democratic achievement is a hard nut to crack. Yet, times are moving on and the order of priorities can change. Any type of isolationism now appears to be fatal for smaller countries. The Swiss will have to make some painful choices in

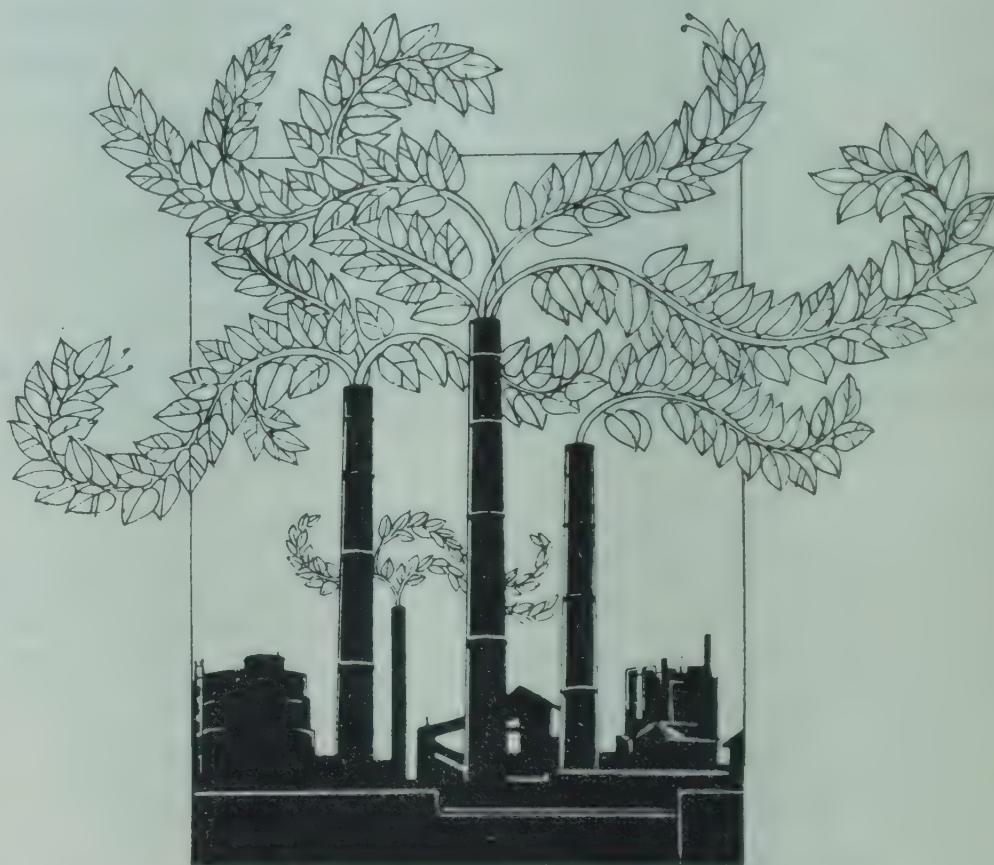


partially giving up their hallowed concepts of federalism and direct democracy for more centralisation in order to join the other European countries which—admittedly—have meanwhile adopted higher standards in democratic practice themselves. What is needed is an imaginative approach. But who wants to risk an adventure when the Swiss economy is doing well and where people enjoy the highest per capita income of any industrialised nation?

While the ongoing Swiss bonanza could easily change for the worse—and signs of it are already appearing on the horizon—the public at large does not seem to take much notice of such dangers. This explains why the debate on the future of federalism in Switzerland, not yet hard pressed by realities, often smacks of nightmarish daydreaming. On the other hand, the vitality of Switzerland has always been characterised by her learning capacity, paired with a cautious approach in the implementation of reform. In this way, many errors done in quick conclusion have been avoided. One may, therefore, justifiably expect that the Swiss will ultimately undergo a new experience in federalism with its inevitable centralist overtones.



# The plant that has grown into many, many trees.



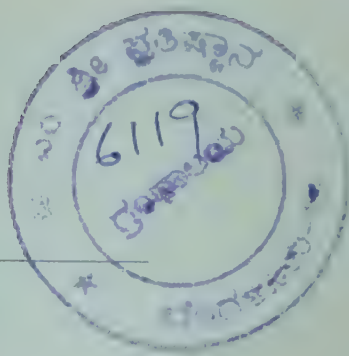
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## *Lessons From the Soviet Revolution\**

**F**ollowing the aborted coup in the Soviet Union, events have moved so fast that it is not easy to discern where India's special interests lie. The Eurocentric concentration of most media reporting, the somewhat excessive gloating over the sad state of Indo-Communion of the Left in overstating the argument that though socialism has been betrayed, it is by no means extinct, have all served to distract us. Fortunately, there are serious commentators who have been pointing out that our priorities should focus much more on the Asian republics and our direct relations with them. Officials have also been working in this direction behind the scenes. The evolution and interaction of these embryonic nations with their neighbours will create a significant new political focus and framework in our region. Revolutions have always made a positive contribution in the long run, however unsettling they were in contemporary terms.

Even though there were vast differences, India and the Soviet Union had similarities in the diversities they had to accommodate in their polity and planning their economies. Today they do share a very similar problem in conceding to and at the same time harnessing the aspirations of individuals and groups for recognition. Properly used in a democratic framework giving due weightage to the various ingredients of national ideology, this could provide the synergy required for building dynamic progressive societies. Pandering to immediate demands and populist programmes will do just the opposite. Unfortunately, political parties and leaders tend too easily to lead us in this direction. It is necessary to avoid expediency and concentrate on longer term needs. In this crucial process, knowledge and exchange of each other's experiences and progress could prove

\* First published in the Annual Issue of *Mainstream* dated 26 October, 1991.

most useful.

At present whatever happens in the periphery, the Slavic and Central Asian republics seem to be working out an institutional arrangement to handle areas of common concern. In a dramatic reversal, power in the central institutions will be limited to that conceded by the constituent units. As of now, no one can be sure whether the process of dissolution may not have to go still further beyond the levels of the republics before cohesive and stable units are in place. It is interesting, and perhaps ironic, that while the European Community is seeking to give its institutions greater supranational competence, what the Soviet Union is seeking is to present a total dissolution. We in India can learn from both these fascinating experiments. It is dangerous to be too complacent and believe that the existing system will always bail us out of our difficulties, even while we abuse and weaken it and make it less and less responsive to the new pressures it has to cope with.

Gorbachev's original reform proposal had three components: glasnost, perestroika and democracy. The last was really the most important. This is, in reality, the single, most conspicuous facet of a worldwide humanist revolution whose objective is a plural and democratic society at the national and international levels. What we still do not know is how long it will take to bring about such a revolution. The inputs are many. A better life or at least the promise of a better life has become a reality for the majority of the world's population. Science, technology, industry and communications play a growing role to increase production as well as to increase awareness. The increasing interdependence of the world economy, the information revolution, the convenience of travel and education have considerably reduced the relevance and importance of national frontiers.

But before we convince ourselves that utopia is around the corner, let us also remember that human motivations often include the desire to acquire power, to dominate and grow rich. At the international level, domination grows with its practice and even the most paternalistic domination can become intolerable. The first attempt at a world arrangement, the Congress of Vienna in 1815, was an arrangement of the great and powerful European States to organise an international system under their aegis. In 1919 and 1945 after the World Wars, an international body comprising all sovereign nation states came into being. However, the rich and the powerful still



managed to organise these institutions so that their position remained unchallenged. Anyhow, the stalemate over the veto in the Security Council soon made the UN almost ineffective in resolving various conflicts. When the weaker states sought to put pressure through the use of their numbers in the General Assembly, this became another reason for the United Nations to be bypassed. Recently it has been given the task of recording and legitimising decisions taken elsewhere. This became possible when the five permanent Security Council members found merit in taking common positions and they were able to carry a majority of the membership with them. Although this is hardly a truly democratic system of functioning, the possibilities are now there for the medium and small powers to act in concert without the irresponsibility they often exhibited in the past. By playing an independent, combined and constructive role, they might now be able to move the UN system towards becoming a responsible organisation. The USA will have to be nursed along this path, as many of its leaders, spokesmen and citizens see it once more as the world's policeman and manager. But it has its weaknesses especially in the economy and cannot function unilaterally. Among its allies in the developed world we should slowly seek to establish rapport with those like France, Germany, and possibly Japan, who do not relish US hegemony in all things.

Democratic functioning is, however, not sufficient in international fora only. Much more important is the need to provide for it within every country and society. This is more important than the debate on the relevance of socialism. Socialism is a global phenomenon, not restricted to communist states, and exists in many manifestations. Intervention by the state or community for redressing inequality and ensuring the public good is not likely to be discarded because Marxism-Leninism and the Communist Party have disappeared in the Soviet Union. It is only the doctrine that a colossal government body knows best that has been found wanting. This is the lesson to be learnt from the break up of the Soviet Union as it should have been learnt from the overthrow of Fascism at the end of World War II. It is very relevant in India, as several distinguished commentators have already pointed out. Our obsession with centrifugal and separatist tendencies have made for overcentralisation in the economy, the polity and the bureaucracy.

The search for identity has let loose group forces which seek domination rather than democracy. Diversity, complexity and

growing awareness require micro-management of most problems with popular participation. National decision-making should be restricted to basic matters. The Indian Union is likely to stand better if the base is strengthened and the top emasculated. This is true of the new constituents of the erstwhile Soviet Union, and also of most nations including many of our developing neighbours and friends. We are fortunate that we have a working economic and political framework and an overall civilisational unity. The problem is one of preserving the advantages of a continental economy and allowing much greater decentralisation of decision-making. This should not only help with secessionist problems in Kashmir, Punjab and Assam, and Naxalite problems in other states, but also with the stagnation in economic growth and the backwardness of a large section of our rural society.

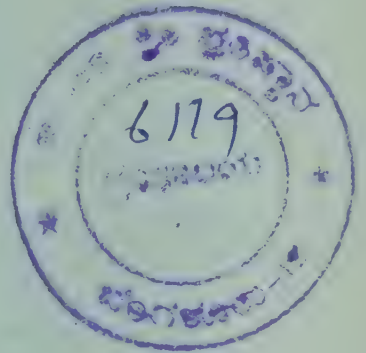
The Central Asian Republics have for long been taken for granted as part of an advanced nation. Indeed they have benefited from economic, educational and other inputs. However, their immediate problem in becoming national entities is that to pursue the goal of modernisation they cannot go back solely to their roots and revert to tribal Islamic societies. (The Slav republics can afford much greater freedom of expression as their societies have European examples to draw from.) Hence even if the communist parties are discredited and the leadership tainted with corruption, the need to retain the gains of modernisation will not allow total discarding of the leadership from existing elites. (Nor indeed will this happen in Russia. New styles and new thinking will go on with a lot of the same people.) They will have to come to terms with their religious and cultural roots in the existing milieu. It would, however, be unwise to assume that fundamentalism either of the Iranian or Wahabi kind will necessarily take over, or indeed that return to religion must be fundamentalist by definition. (In fact, Iranian, Saudi, Turkish and Pakistani interests will probably all clash in this arena.) Religion can provide an ingredient in the nationalist ideology without being negative.

Gazing into a crystal ball, one sees the possible emergence of societies in Central Asia, not very different from our own, with similar needs and urges. The emergence of new nation states in Soviet Central Asia could also spill over into the minority regions of China. Their preferred system would affect Afghanistan. This emphasises the need for us to augment our knowledge of this region



and strengthen our relations with them. The Government is conscious of the need; other sectors such as academics, media and business need to join in.

Russia will probably be the residuary region of the Soviet Union as a great power and in carrying out international obligations for a while, with the other Slav republics exhibiting a leaning towards Europe and the West is inevitable. But as normalcy returns, the reality of its Eurasian status should reassert itself. We have abundant reasons including important economic and security interests to maintain the best and closest relations with Russia. Ukraine and the other European units cannot be neglected either. Perseverance and patience may be necessary till they sort themselves out. Hopefully, the process will be easier with the Asians. The present ties may be limited. But history reminds us that people, ideas and trade went to and fro along the Silk Route bringing together the great civilisations of that time. We would do well to follow in those footsteps.





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## *New State Structures in the Soviet Union\**

**T**he failure of the attempted coup in the Soviet Union (19–21 August 1991) has led to a significant decline in the role of the Centre and Central Institutions in the polity of the USSR. Had the coup not been attempted, at least some of the Soviet republics would have signed a Union Treaty on 20th August which would have strengthened their sovereignties and given them substantial powers while still retaining a powerful role for the Centre. However, the failure of the coup dramatically transformed the situation in the USSR as it signified the emergence of sovereign, independent republics. The Baltic republics whose independence was recognised soon after the aborted coup were the greatest beneficiaries of the decline of the Centre. Other republics, with the exception of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), Kazakhstan and Turkmenia moved ahead and declared themselves independent. This would help them in strengthening their bargaining power during the negotiations for a new union treaty as well as a host of other agreements.

The imprint of the republics—particularly Russia—was clear on the developments during the days of the coup and soon after its failure. Yeltsin issued a number of decrees, some of them since cancelled, whereby as President of RSFSR he took over the functions of the USSR President. It was the Russian Parliament, rather than the USSR Supreme Soviet, which became the highest legislative body during the coup. Power seemed to have passed to the hands of Russia and this made Gorbachev publicly caution Boris Yeltsin not to usurp the powers of the Centre. Even when Gorbachev did exercise his powers to reorganise the central institutions soon after the coup, he

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\* Paper presented at the Seminar on "Whither the Second Soviet Revolution" at the India International Centre on 24 September, 1991.

was constantly influenced by Russia. Gorbachev publicly criticised the role of the USSR Supreme Soviet and praised that of Russia and the Russian Parliament. Soon, the USSR Supreme Soviet dissolved itself, though not before recommending the convocation of an extraordinary session of the Congress of Peoples' Deputies of USSR. Thus its tenure ended prematurely and suddenly. This legislative body was shown in an unfavourable contrast to the Russian Parliament.

The Congress of Peoples' Deputies of USSR, the highest representative body in the USSR and to which Gorbachev owes his elections as the President, is presently in a state of suspended animation. Just before its extraordinary session which began on 2 September, Yeltsin and others expressed fears that attempts might be made at the Congress session to stage a constitutional coup. However, thanks to some outstanding manoeuvring by Gorbachev and others, the Congress passed some resolutions of historic significance which laid the foundation of the new political and economic structures in USSR. The most important feature of these structures is that henceforth republics will play an important role in decision-making in USSR.

On 2 September, Kazakh President presented, on behalf of Gorbachev and 10 Soviet republics, a seven-point plan of transformation of USSR. This eventually became the basis of the new political and economic structures in the country. The main features of this plan were: (a) signing of a treaty of sovereign states in which each republic will independently determine the form of its participation in the union; (b) appeal to all republics to immediately conclude an economic union to ensure a free common economic space; and (c) creations of interim structures during the transitional period. These interim structures would include (1) a Council of the Representatives of Peoples' Deputies on the principle of equal representation of 20 deputies from each union republic; (2) a state Council including an interim, inter-republican council to implement economic reforms. Other features of the plan included the conclusion of an agreement on collective security, united armed forces, single military strategic space; strict observance of all international agreements and commitments; and support to union republics to seek membership of UN.

The resolution adopted by the CPD on 5 September incorporated most of the points of the Nazarbaev plan. It called for speeding up the process of the signing of a treaty of union of sovereign states based



on the principles of the independence and territorial integrity of states; observance of the rights of individuals and peoples, social justice and democracy. Significantly, the resolution envisaged a series of inter-republican agreements on economy, currency, financial, scientific-technical, ecology, rights and freedom of citizens and other issues. It also endorsed the principle of collective security based on united armed forces and unified management of nuclear and other arsenals of weapons of mass destruction. It endorsed the setting up of an economic committee to draft out an inter-republican economic agreement between all republics, including those not wishing to remain in the Union. For republics which were leaving the Union, the CPD resolution stipulates that they should hold talks with the USSR to resolve a whole range of issues related to secession. It also required of them to immediately accede to the NPT and the Final Act of CSCE and to other international treaties and agreements. Substance to the CPD resolution was given by the USSR Law on Bodies of State Power and Administration of the USSR during the transitional period. Signed by Gorbachev on 5 September, the Law provides for structures which have been entrusted with the responsibility for the management and administration of the country.

**E**ssentially, the Law provides for the setting up of a two-chamber house—The USSR Supreme Soviet. The Upper House is called the Council of the Republics and shall comprise 20 deputies from each republic who will be selected by the republican parliaments from among existing deputies of the republics. The RSFSR shall have 52 deputies in the Council of Republics. The other autonomous union republics shall additionally delegate to the Council of the Republics one deputy from each such constituent republic or autonomous formation. Thus, different republics will have a different number of deputies in the Council of the Republics. However, to ensure equality, each republic will have only one vote in the Council of Republics.

The Lower House—The Council of Union—shall be formed of deputies from the Union Republics from among Peoples' Deputies of the USSR in accordance with the supreme bodies of state power of union republics (Art. I). (This formulation leaves the exact composition of the Lower House and the manner of its formulation rather vague. The two Houses by joint decision make amendments in the

constitution, admit new states to the USSR, hear out the USSR President on important issues, approve the union budget, declare war and conclude peace. The Council of the Republics shall decide on the organisational and procedural issues pertaining to the Union bodies, ratify and denounce international treaties of the USSR. The Council of the Union shall examine questions of ensuring rights and freedoms of the citizens of USSR and deal with issues which do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Upper House. An interesting aspect of the working of the new political structures in the Soviet Union is that the Union republics shall have the right to suspend the union laws on their territory if they contradict the republican constitutions (Art. 2).

The State Council of USSR has been set up as the highest executive body of USSR. It would consist of the USSR President and the "supreme executives" of the union republics specified in the constitution. The State Council shall work under the supervision of the President and shall "itself decide the order of its activities". Decisions of the State Council of USSR shall be binding (Art. 3). The post of Vice-President stands abolished. If, for some reason, the President cannot perform his duties, the State Council shall elect from among its members Chairman to "temporarily" discharge the duties of the President. Such a decision shall be approved by the Supreme Soviet of USSR "within three days" (Art. 4).

The Law also provides for the creation of an inter-republican Economic Committee to coordinate and manage the national economy. The Chairman of this body will be appointed by the President of the USSR "with the consent of the State Council of USSR". Supervision of the federal bodies which deal with defence and security matters, law and order, and international affairs shall be done by the USSR President and the State Council of the USSR (Art. 5).

This, then, is the basic structure of the transitional institutions created by the Congress of Peoples' of USSR. How have these institutions been working?

(a) *Supreme Soviet*: The USSR Supreme Soviet has yet to be reconstituted. According to the existing provisions, the new parliament will be constituted out of the existing deputies. At some future date, there would be elections for this body. The precise role of the 'Congress of Peoples' Deputies is not as yet clear. It is also not



clear how the functions of the executive and the legislature will be demarcated.

(b) *USSR State Council*: The USSR State Council has been quite active. On 6 September, it took the historic decision to recognise the independence of the Baltic States. On 16–17 September, it discussed several vital issues including the food situation in USSR and provisions for winters, the inter-republican economic agreement (which it approved 'in principle'), the state of affairs in fundamental research projects in the country, a draft law on the formation of a Legal Commission under the USSR State Council and several other issues. Its meetings have been attended by 10 Soviet republics. It also passed a resolution on agriculture and agricultural reforms in the Soviet Union. From Russian accounts, it would appear that the debates in the USSR State Council have been productive and have led to the removal of doubts that some republics harboured towards Russia.

Gorbachev has also been discussing the reorganisation of the President's office with the USSR State Council. He has proposed the formation of a Consultative-Political Council in the President's office. Many of Gorbachev's advisers are expected to be in this Council. It is not clear how this Council will be reconstituted and whether there would be republican participation in this.

(c) *The Inter-Republican Economic Committee*: So far the inter-republican economic committee which would effectively act as the economic part of the Union Government has not been constituted although the State Council has agreed on the appointment of Russian Premier Ivan Silaev as its Chairman. Till the inter-republican economic committee is constituted, the Committee for the Management of Economy that was set up by Gorbachev on his return from Foros will continue to discharge its functions. The formation of the inter-republican committee is expected to take some time as the republics have not yet been able to decide upon their respective delegations. The State Council of USSR has approved Yavlinsky's plan for the economic union but only "in principle". This has led to comments in the Soviet media about the practical difficulties in forging such a union.

(d) *Council of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of USSR and Republics*: The mechanisms for the formulation and implementation of the foreign policy of USSR are also undergoing changes. All the republics

have their own foreign minister and foreign ministries. The USSR foreign ministries are also being restructured. A new collegium of the ministry has been set up and its members include many non-officials. A bill on Diplomatic Service is under consideration. A Council of the Foreign Ministries of USSR and the republics has also been set up and an executive secretariat of the Council is under formation. The Missions abroad are being strengthened to provide for adequate representation of the republics. Some republics may be setting up their own representations abroad. The collegium has also decided to work out a temporary statute of the Council of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of USSR and the republics before the end of October. Work on drawing up a document defining the competence of the Union Foreign Ministry and the Republican Ministries has also begun.

(e) *The Defence and Security Bodies:* The Defence and Security organs are also being restructured. Gorbachev has issued a decree setting up a Military Reforms Council (MRC) which will have republican participation and be responsible for military reforms. The Congress resolutions call for a unified army and a single military strategic space and the Union defence ministry plans detailed negotiations with the republics. Defence Minister Shapshnikov has proposed a Defence Council with republican representatives as its members.

A radical military reform is on the cards. General Lobov, the new Chief of the Soviet armed forces, has spoken of the contours of such a reform; each sovereign republic should have one military district, a defence ministry and one military commander. There should be two parallel, coordinating structures namely military-political ones (national and republican defence ministries) and purely military ones. The problem of military expenditures and the share of the republics should be settled through a new union treaty. Republics could also cooperate with each other in sharing military expenditure. A portion of troops recruited in the republics should be deputed to the national army and also to other republican armies and the army should be reorganised on a professional basis. The composition and tasks of strategic forces should be determined by appropriate treaties between the republics and the centre. New weapons states are impermissible.

Apart from the changes of the armed forces, the KGB is also



being restructured. Heads of the republican KGBs and the Union KGB have already held discussions on the future organisation of the security agencies.

These are only some ideas on a possible restructuring of the armed forces. The task of re-organisation will be complex. But it is obvious that the republics will play an important role in this field also.

(f) *Structures in the Republics:* The evolving structures in the republics will also play an important role in the functioning of Union structures. Already, many republics are going in for direct presidential elections. This raises the possibility of differences in the interests of the executives' and the republicans' parliaments. (Witness criticism of Yeltsin's decrees in the Russian Parliament.) Some of the Republics have also constituted their own State Councils (RSFSR) and Supreme Councils (Belorussia). It is as yet too early to clearly discern the trends in this regard in different republics. Republics are also rapidly concluding agreements and treaties with each other to safeguard their interests. The RSFSR—Ukraine and RSFSR—and Kazakhstan after the coup are of significance.

**I**t is as yet too early to make any definite assessment of the effectiveness of the new structures for the simple reason that most of them are meant to be of interim nature and are presently in formative stages. Some of them have not even been formed. Yet, according to Gorbachev, the Novo-Ogarevo process of centre-republicans reconciliation which began in April this year is continuing and the meetings of the USSR State Council, are the manifestations of this process. In the latest meetings of the USSR State Council, important decisions have been taken. If these decisions are implemented, the efficacy of the State Council would be proved. The proper handling of the food situation in the country in the coming winter is of utmost importance and requires a great deal of coordination. Success in this task will reinforce the credibility of the newly emerging structures.

The inter-linkages amongst the republics, particularly the economic ones, if broken, can bring hardship for several republics. Take for instance the question of energy supplies. Some of the republics like Georgia and Moldova, who are not interested in

joining the Union, import all their oil and coal requirements from other republics. Even Russia, with its enormous coal output, is compelled to import 13 per cent of its consumption of coal from other republics. It also imports 26 per cent of its consumption of rolled ferrous metal products. Republics like Kirghizia, Tajikistan, Armenia, Turkmenia and Estonia import almost 100 per cent of their requirements of commercial timber from other republics (*Izvestia*, 9 September, 1991). These are some of the examples which illustrate why most republics, irrespective of the fact whether they remain in the Union or not, would be interested in an economic union. Even the Baltic States are interested in retaining economic ties with Soviet republics.

Similarly, the distribution of ethnic groups throughout the USSR makes it possible that the Soviet republics may agree on guarantees of human rights and individual's freedoms in their respective territories. The weak economic situation of most republics, particularly the smaller ones, will make it difficult for them to have elaborate security structures. There again, they might like to enter into agreements with each other to safeguard their political and other interests (e.g. recent treaties between RSFSR and Ukraine; RSFSR and Kazakhstan).

There are a host of other problems which the republics may not be able to resolve on their own. The Soviet Central Asian republics, in a Summit meeting in Tashkent in August 1991, referred to several such problems (e.g. ecological, shortage of various goods, etc.) which could be resolved only through joint action. Since June 1990, declarations have been made by the Soviet Central Asian leaders to coordinate economic policies. Possibilities of regional structures emerging in the USSR in different parts of the country arise.

Thus, there exist very sound reasons compelling the republics to enter into inter-republican agreements of various kinds and harmonise their interests. Gorbachev, in a recent interview to *Izvestia* (18 September, 1991), remarked that while the renewal of the country could take 10–15 years, the centrepetal (as opposed to centrifugal) tendencies are gaining momentum. However, this is not to undermine the difficulties that lie ahead in bringing republics together on a host of issues. Negotiations could be tedious and longdrawn. Some pertinent questions are:

(a) There are obvious differences in the political, economic and cultural levels of development amongst different republics. Will



these dissimilarities come in the way of smooth evolution of inter-republican agreements and their implementation? In particular, what will be the role of Russia in the inter-republican agreements?

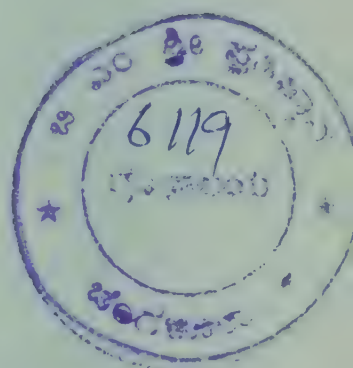
(b) A large number of inter-republican agreements would be required on different socio-economic and political issues. Will such a system turn out to be unwieldy in its formulation and implementation? What will be the mechanism of the resolution of inter-republican disputes?

(c) Successful resolution of the ethnic issues is essential for the working of inter-republican agreements. Moreover, ethnic issues involve several republics. How will these issues be resolved? Will there be a uniform code of conduct for the observance of human rights in different republics?

(d) Will there be differences in the geo-strategic interests of republics leading to the emergence of several foreign policies? How will these interests be harmonised?

(e) Developments within a republic can influence those in others (e.g. Russia). Will there be a CSCE type of collective mechanism to resolve intra-republican disputes on a collective basis?

This is only an illustrative list of issues on which there is no clarity as yet. What happens in the transitional period in USSR will have a marked influence on the future working of a very complicated and unique confederal structure that is sought to be erected in USSR.



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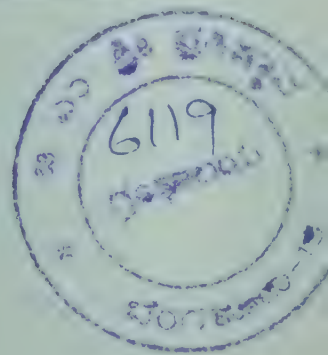
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SURJIT MANSINGH

*Towards Regional Cooperation*

**Waters of Hope: Integrated Water Resource Development and Regional Cooperation within the Himalayan-Ganga-Brahmaputra-Barak Basin**, by B.G. Verghese, Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., New Delhi, 1990, p. 446, Rs 295.

To read B.G. Verghese is invariably a stimulating and enlightening experience. He combines a vast fund of knowledge with a breadth of vision, sobriety of perspective, finely honed sense of judgement and careful language. He commands the wide respect he does because his opinion is always soundly based and well documented; he inspires trust.

All these qualities are to be found in George Verghese's imposing volume, *Waters of Hope*. The scope of this work is as vast as the images evoked by the names in the title: Himalaya! Ganga! Brahmaputra! But this is no recitation of mythology, no invocation of gods and goddesses to rescue us from our own follies. Instead, Verghese exposes the "glaring contradiction of the largest concentration of phe-

world's most poor unable to garner the bounty of one of the world's richest natural resource regions in which they live." (p. 385) He finds this disastrous situation to be the result mainly of myopic political gestures made in India (as well as in Bangladesh and Nepal) at the cost of long term development planning and implementation of sensible but hard decisions with respect to investment in the very basis of infrastructure—soil and water.

Verghese examines in turn the many different issues relating to holistic development for the common good of hundreds of millions of people living in the Ganges basin across five national boundaries. The issues are: changes in nature, historical legacies, farm performance, agrarian reform and rural mobilisation, irrigation, water management, flood control, environmental degradation and protection, energy, dams, health and sanitation, fisheries, waterways for commerce and communication, international and municipal laws on water usage and regional cooperation—or its lack—in South Asia.

For each one of these topics he has clearly done considerable

research, acknowledging his sources when necessary and listing references in nearly 20 pages at the end of the book. (A neat glossary and good index are also included.) He probably could have published three or four separate books for the same effort this one must have taken but, as the Director of the Centre for Policy Research, V.A. Pai Panandikar, aptly says in his Foreword, "the volume brings together within a single cover a range of information and issues that would otherwise necessitate scouring a library." (p. vi.) Yet such is Verghese's skill as a writer—and his acquaintance with the non-library minded public—that a general reader, or even an official, with an interest in the subject, can peruse this book and understand it. However, patience is required of the reader, and one possible danger is to fasten on a particular viewpoint expressed in some chapter and overlook another, equally valid, perspective spelled out elsewhere, both in admirable detail.

For example, opponents of environmental enthusiasts might well cite Chapter 1 in support of an opinion that changing Nature herself (rather than destructive human behaviour) is responsible for the fragility of the Himalayas and recurring floods in the north Indian plains. They would have to refer to Chapters 7 and 8 to find out how and why improper land use, proliferation of population and livestock and consequential deforestation have multiplier effects on natural disasters to the point where some people fear

that the Himalayas cannot be saved and that our once green subcontinent has been condemned by its twentieth century inhabitants to desertification.

George Verghese is not to be numbered among such doomsdayers. It is a measure of his deep rooted faith in human rationality and the solubility of problems that he entitled this product of years of study and hundreds of interviews as he did; a lesser man might have given up, or chronicled grievous sins of omission and commission calling it *Waters of Despair!* Instead, Verghese has undertaken a task of public education in the belief that "people do not despoil the good earth out of choice but from ignorance and, most often, from necessity, for survival". (p. 143)

Some people who work with the day-to-day business of running non-governmental organisations committed to integrated rural development in particular regions may take exception to the "grand design" approach adopted by Verghese. They see problems in microcosms of village or district. He writes about an entire system of rivers broadly described as the 'Ganges basin' and inclusive of the mighty Brahmaputra, the largest storehouse of unexploited water and energy on the subcontinent. He strongly advocates establishing a framework of long-term political relationships in the region to facilitate planning and cooperation in multi-faceted water and soil management and to phase out such "beggar my



neighbour" activities of state and national governments as have impeded or halted worthwhile projects. But Verghese reaches this point only after exploring problems on the ground, such as gaining local involvement in protection of trees, ensuring efficient and equitable distribution of irrigation, conserving soil while providing employment, and so on. There is nothing facile about his conclusions that narrow departmentalised thinking is mistaken, or that "a quantum jump in thinking rather than a search for mere incremental gains [is required] if real headway is to be achieved". (p. 394)

One quantum leap is to look at the cis and trans Himalaya rivers flowing through Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and India together. The two line maps especially drawn for this volume illustrate their interrelationships as well as the relatively few projects constructed on them. One would wish for topographical or coloured maps, but those might have inflated the costs of an otherwise reasonably priced volume. Another tremendous effort is required in these days of interest group politics to see environmental protection and economic development as two sides of the same coin. According to Verghese, not only is poverty the greatest pollutant, but it is incorrect or incomplete development and romanticised environmentalism that compete with each other. Properly planned and integrated development would enhance nature, not

violate her.

The author's qualities are also his liabilities. He manages to maintain a measured tone even when referring to matters that call for rage. For example, he says "the tradition of open air defecation that prevails over much of the Basin area is not merely unsanitary and a health hazard but a human indignity." (p. 249) Understatement is not the word! Earlier, in Chapter 4 on agrarian relations, he writes, "feudal and inequitable agrarian relations constitute key constraints in the development, utilisation and sound management of water and technologies that have opened up new agricultural opportunities. . . . The Basin is capital-short, but labour-abundant. The idle labour can be productively absorbed . . . This is unlikely to happen unless there are structural changes and the poor have reasonable certainty of tangible gains and institutional support to achieve what has been amply demonstrated to be possible." (p. 70) Isn't that why so many people have turned to guns instead?

Similarly, Verghese is restrained in his criticisms of various unnamed officials that have frustrated efforts at regional cooperation in South Asia and only gently castigates the Government of India for failing to honour its commitment to transfer two tiny enclaves under the Indo-Bangladesh Boundary Agreement of 1974: "Inability to live up to a solemn treaty on such a trivial matter erodes India's credibility when it asks Bangladesh

to take its word on such a spectacular project as the Brahmaputra-Ganga Link and associated storage dams." (p. 373)

And finally, one must ask who will read this weighty and lengthy volume? It should have a stronger impact on the South Asian public than reference books on library shelves usually make, but that will depend on people taking the trouble to dig out the policy recommendations—and there are many—and ramming them home to possibly unlettered decision makers in the countries concerned. However, this

book is bound to become a recommended text in the better schools of environmental management around the world, including the United States and United Kingdom. Because many of the students attending those schools will be, or in some cases already are, influential figures in the Himalaya and the Basin, perhaps they will join the many little people toiling away despite the oppression of the powerful to fulfil George Verghese's down-to-earth dreams expressed in *Waters of Hope*. We too can hope.

S U N E E T C H O P R A

## *Development Economics*

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**Developing Rural India: Policies, Politics and Progress** by Walter C. Neale, *Allied Publishers*, 1990, p. 263

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**T**his book deals with a subject that has virtually been flogged out of shape from almost any perspective. So it is not surprising that Walter Neale has to start from a definition of 'land' itself. He correctly notes that European concepts of 'land' and 'tenure' as they exist legally today, do not obtain

in the traditional concept of 'land-ownership' as we know it in India.

However, starting from this perceptive position his academism prevents him from linking these institutions to a broader scheme of human development as Morgan and Marx did, to show that no institution is sacrosanct, and all necessarily must change. He, on the other hand, uses the different institutional patterns in the manner of anthropology, to present a static photograph, when the old and the new are neither better nor worse; they are only different.

As a result, his limited vision



allows him to only explain the attitude of the classes most responsible for India's backwardness in agriculture, the *zamindars* and *talluqadars*, and of course, the British colonial power that created them but not criticise them. He does so by divorcing political from economic sense, and exonerates the British Colonialists and Indian intermediary classes for their total economic irresponsibility and greed by saying "one should be kind in criticising a miscast actor and restrained in criticising the casting director until one can point to actors more suitable to the role". He, in fact, accepts the play both the casting director and the actors chose to present: colonialism, when there is absolutely no evidence to show it was either the only alternative at the time or desirable. Thus, while accepting that the problems India faced were the result of the conflict between its traditional values and those imposed on it by a foreign power, his approach stresses how they could be made comprehensible to the two parties concerned, without any attempt to see if there was another alternative and which sections of Indian society were struggling to bring it about.

Interestingly, these alternative classes are all subsumed in the undifferentiated "village system" and only sporadic and marginal outbursts are allowed to come into consideration. For example, he notes that "as the transformation (of the village system) continues there will be great strains. The Naxalite movement, with its violence against

landholders, may illustrate one side of the strains; the attacks on Harijan hamlets by clean-caste Hindus may illustrate the other side". But he completely ignores the Talingana armed struggle and its social impact which resulted in the massive land reform in West Bengal and Kerala, led by the Communist Parties and while in other parts of the country it was taken up by other forces, like the National Conference in Kashmir, or Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan and the UP Zamindari Abolition Act, both a Congress response to the uprising in Andhra obviously the strains are not so marginal, nor are the possible solutions. The widespread call for land-reforms from all the sections that became active in it after Telangana shows that it is a structural change that will have to be brought about by any community development programme, whatever the political limitations of those who are forced to implement it. Neale's functionalist perspective, of course, is totally blind to all this.

In fact, where he does mention this thoroughgoing process, it is only to denigrate it. He says "The reforms did not lead, at least in any clearly identifiable way, to increased productivity and welfare in the countryside. Agricultural output has indeed been rising for the past thirty years if not steadily year by year, it has been rising steadily triennium by triennium, the middle 1960s excepted. The point here is that there is no correlation between the states that enacted thoroughgoing land reforms and the states that have



shown the larger increases in agricultural output." In fact, the Economic Survey of 1990-91 has noted how the rate of growth in agriculture in West Bengal (where the most successful land reforms have taken place) between the sixth and seventh plans, was the highest in the country at 34 per cent in comparison to 23 per cent in Punjab and 18 per cent in UP. His bias prevents him from seeing this, of course.

That this bias is pro-colonia is evident from his statement that "The Indian national movement believed that rural poverty, social tensions, and inequities amounting to exploitation were a consequence of the system of land tenure and that the system of land tenure was a product of British rule. The congress leaders could, correctly, point to the changes in policy and administrative practice introduced by the British in granting title, in recognising rights, and in enforcing a system of British contract law. They were also correct when they said that the landholders were protected in their rights by the police power of the British. On the face of it, then, they had a case. But their case overlooked three crucial elements in the development of the tenurial system."

And what does he put out in their defence? First, that the land distribution the British found reflected the power distribution. That they adjusted themselves and even "kuckled under"—so it is not British at all, but Indian! Without going into detail as to how the British radically

transformed power relations by wiping out the Mughals, the Nawabs of Bengal and Oudh, the Peshwas, the ruling house of Punjab, and a host of other ruling families, he totally ignores the fact that the British imposed their version of 'might is right' because that is what colonialism was based on.

If he can state "the relative power which had determined the distribution of land among Indians at the time the British arrived was power in its crudest form—the ability to beat, rape, kill and burn," one can say the same on a far larger scale for British conquest—and also that the colonial power came to terms with the most unscrupulous elements among these, like the first Nawab of Tonk who was the Pindari chief, and kept them in power with a force that no state before the colonial one could ever have done. In fact, they institutionalised a reign of terror in the Indian states as no one else before them had been able to. And if they found a power-broker willing and interested enough in modernising himself and his people, like Tipu Sultan, they put an end to him. So it would appear, that both the adjustment and knuckling under were the policy dictates of running a colonial state and had little to do with the state of Indian society except in as far as it had to be kept subservient to the imperial power. But Neale's narrow perspective makes him ignore these realities.

What then is his analysis of post-independence reforms and their failure? His answer lies in Indian

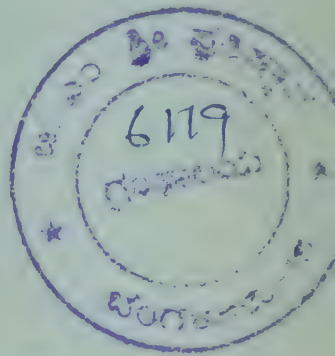


society, "in which the organising principle of hierarchy, the exceedingly complex layering and interpenetration of rights and interests, and a political structure based on faction and social distance as much as upon economic class made it impossible, *from the beginning*, to carry through reforms of 'land to the tiller' and local democracy of Jeffersonian, American Homestead, or French Revolutionary models." So, bureaucratic corruption, the failure of a particular path of development in post-independence India, a blind spot with regard to the welfare of the landless and agricultural workers and the reason why there is a lack of political will to

make the structural changes necessary, are all ignored. This is not surprising, as Neale uses a structural-functional approach, well-known in late imperial anthropology, which is descriptive and not analytical, and explores only the functioning of institutions within a social framework, with change coming in only as an external factor and, as such, permitting no analysis of necessary changes and how to bring them about internally. From such a perspective, he can only push the blame back to pre-existing conditions "from the beginning" rather than be critical of those that are in existence. Such an approach is excellent as an apology but fails to convince.

KATHLEEN RAINE

### *Beyond Sorrow*




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**Selected Short Stories** by Rabindranath Tagore, translated from Bengali by William Radice, Penguin Books, p. 322.

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**I** first heard the name of Rabindranath Tagore in my childhood. My mother always kept a copy of *Gitanjali* (1913)

translated by the poet himself near her. At that time his imposing and beautiful figure seemed the living embodiment of the India of the Imagination—as indeed he was. He looked more like a sage than a poet and was in fact an aristocrat and land-owner (a *zamindar*). He was the darling of the west and his renunciation of honours bestowed by the British Government (in 1915), after the massacre of Amritsar, four years later, was all the more effective.

Frankly, I found the *Gitanjali* over-sweet, with too many phrases like 'endless worlds', 'Infinite sky', 'vast day', inversions like 'find her not', 'know not', 'seek not' and the liberal use of the second person singular. Yet these 'song-offerings' brought India's stephanotis-breath of beauty and spacious solemnity, a universe of feeling unknown to the West. To my mother, whose feelings had been formed by Scotland's songs and ballads, Tagore's world, rooted likewise in a rich folk-culture, was less strange. Yeats, who admired and not a little envied Tagore his roots within the unity of Indian civilisation and Bengali culture, wrote (in *The Celtic Twilight*, 1902) "Folk art is, indeed, the oldest of the aristocracies of thought, and because it refuses what is passing and trivial, the merely clever and pretty, as certainly as the vulgar and insincere, and because it has gathered into itself the simplest and most unforgettable thoughts of the generations, it is the soil where all great art is rooted" ('*By the Roadside*').

In his Introduction to *Gitanjali* Yeats wrote, of what is at the same time the essential greatness of Tagore, and his deepest under-standing of the role of the poet:

These lyrics—which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention—display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear

as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes. A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble. If the civilisation of Bengal remains unbroken, if that common mind which—as one divines—runs through all, is not, as with us, broken into a dozen minds that know nothing of each other, something even of what is most subtle in these verses will have come, in a few generations, to the beggar on the roads.

Yeats had worked, with their mutual friend William Rothenstein, in revising (for Macmillan) Tagore's translations into English acceptable to the English ear, and was annoyed when Tagore, not recognising his own limitations in a language he knew well by Indian-English standards, took to publishing his own translations. Tagore continued to send Yeats his books as they appeared; and his Kabir translations Yeats certainly read with profit to his own work.

It is largely because of the inadequacy of his translations that Tagore's great genius, recognised by Yeats and once acclaimed possibly for the wrong reasons as a Western fashion, has since been neglected. Penguin Books published William Radice's *Selections of Tagore's poems* in 1985. (We had the privilege of



publishing a group of these in advance of that Collection in *Temenos* 5). Himself an excellent poet (nurtured in those English values of the soul which were the theme of Shakespeare and other unfashionable creators of English civilisation), William Radice is one of those rare translators in the tradition of Edward Fitzgerald and Arthur Waley who can claim to have naturalised some writer, or school of literature, into the English language. His translations of Tagore's poems enabled English readers to appreciate for the first time that Tagore truly is a great poet. Since Tagore's own there have been several Indian translators, notably Aurobindo Bose, a friend and follower of Tagore at his famous International University of the Learning of the Imagination at Shantiniketan. These may be correct but are pedestrian in the extreme; and Indian English is—above all in poetry—another language. (How many Indians have been unable to understand that Sri Bose's long narrative poem *Savitri* is excruciating to the English reader, bearing no relation to the genius of the language it uses with such fluency.)

Radice's translations, Indian readers may complain, miss this or that nuance of the meaning of the original; but in comparison with all previous versions they have the freshness of an old master from which layers of dust and varnish have been removed by an expert hand. In this last decade of the century few writers have a mastery of the English

language in all the grammatical subtlety and command of near-synonymns of a century ago. 'Educated English' is not a respected standard, as in France the French language is taught in the State schools—rather the reverse, some notion that excellence is undemocratic has gone far to destroy that language, which is surely our greatest national inheritance. Not that William Radice's English is either pedantic or written for the page: on the contrary, he writes with ease and simplicity, and for the ear. The beauty of English for the ear, in the babel of demotic speech that assails us continually from the 'media', has become as rare as pure water in our springs and rivers.

The present collection of short stories is, again, a model of excellence; in the translation itself, and the illuminating notes, containing a rich selection of letters and an introduction both informative and, as a critical assessment of Tagore, the best since Yeats's Introduction to the *Gitanjali*.

That forms as it were a *tanpura* continuously accompanied to human melodies. There both the landscape and the human world spoke to the poet's soul in the intimate way the West of Ireland spoke to the young Yeats (*The Celtic Twilight* was published in 1902) or the Lake District to Wordsworth.

William Radice perceptively compares Tagore to Wordsworth as a master of what he describes as a 'realism of feeling'. He is surely thinking less of *The Prelude* than of

the author of 'Michael' and the Lucy poems; and I can think of no other English writer, except perhaps Hardy at his best, who can be compared with this Indian master of the soul's whole gamut of the world of feeling, from the purest love to the purest sorrow, and the most awesome, unendurable regions of Hades. And neither Yeats nor Wordsworth—nor any European writer I can think of—sees the scope of humanity in such amplitude, doubtless for the reason Radice gives, that his art is rooted in a spiritual civilisation such as the modern West has not known:

In Tagore's art—even in his most realistic, prosaic, ironic or sceptical art—we are never far from the transcendental Spirit that Indians through the ages have attempted to know and articulate. The sages who wrote the Upanishads in the seclusion of their forest hermitages realised that there must be a supreme cosmic force behind the *samsara* of mortal existence, the *maya* (illusion) of sense-perception, or the *svargaloka* (heaven) of the vedic and Hindu gods; and Tagore's spiritual endeavours were in direct descent from theirs. He took it for granted that higher levels of human consciousness were made of this spirit. The aim of spiritual life was to unite human with cosmic consciousness. As a romantic artist, Tagore strove to do this through art rather than through meditation or mysticism; but in this he was extending the central Indian tradition, not diverging from it.

The stories are simple, about unselfconscious people, illiterate women, the unloved schoolboy who pined away from home, the school-friend whose grief was total when the little girl next door would no longer speak to her after a family law-suit; the child-wife whose heart was shattered when her husband confiscated the notebook in which she used to write poems and thoughts; the childhood lovers who should have married after spending a night together on a mud-bank waiting for a flood to subside without exchanging a word. Stranger and more fearful stories of the woman returning from the cremation-ground after a supposed death; and the miser who sacrificed a child so that his spirit might guard his hoard. Modern people too, like the neglected wife who ran away and in her bitterness becomes a great actress. But the common theme of all is the immeasurable scope of the heart.

Raja Rao, India's greatest novelist in the English language, wrote (in *The Serpent and the Rope*) that 'India begins beyond sorrow'. Sacrifice has ever been deemed the price at which the heavenly gifts are to be bought. The American culture of the 'pursuit of happiness', all but precludes such experiences as Tagore describes in all their simplicity and dignity in these great stories; every one of which comes from that place beyond sorrow.

To Western readers Tagore's 'realism of feeling' has often seemed sentimental—that is to say the feeling



is in excess of the real situation. Radice writes:

Tagore's art is a vulnerable art. Nearly all his writings are vulnerable to criticism, philistinism and contempt, because of his willingness to wear his heart on his sleeve, to take on themes that other writers would find grandiose, sentimental or embarrassing, and his refusal to cloak his utterances in cleverness, urbanity or double-talk. The fact that his works are so difficult to translate has made him doubly vulnerable to criticism by foreigners able to read him only in bad translations.

Seen, however, from an Indian perspective, it is rather that Western feeling and responses are inadequate; and what was true when Tagore wrote has since worsened into an insensitivity ever cruder and more callous. William Radice, who is by no means uncritical in his admiration of Tagore, nor glamourised by Indian mysticism goes to the heart of the matter when he relates these differences to the values of two very different civilisations. Tagore himself, for all his openness to the Western world (excessive, some might say) has this to say on Europe. After writing lyrically of an evening scene by the Gorai river, he goes on to say: "Perhaps I shall never get back such an evening again in any future life" and then continues "It is strange that my greatest fear is of being born in Europe—because in

Europe there is never a chance to bare one's soul so loftily; or if one does people are ever critical. . . ."! Europeans have "a stiff, durable sort of mind, clipped and hammered into shape by strict laws."

There is little point in arguing as to whether Tagore is greater as a lyric poet or as a writer of stories—or indeed of plays, songs, essays, besides paintings; for the greatness of genius lies in some vision that transcends these expressions with their appropriate skills.

To me these stories are a shaming reminder of how far our coarsened Western souls have fallen below the human norm of fitting sympathy with daily love, daily sorrow and grief and beauty; or the recognition of the daily cruelties of human beings to the simple and vulnerable soul, insensitised by our materialist values. It is not for us to evaluate Tagore by Western standards but rather to measure those standards against a lost, but immemorial norm. To invoke Raja Rao again, India is not a nationality (he writes) but a state of mind, discovered by whoever attains it. We have far to go! Bengali's are never satisfied that Western readers have appreciated Tagore's great art, as it has flowered from the refined culture of Bengal. It is reassuring to know that William Radice's translations have earned him literary awards both in West Bengal and in Bangladesh, from Tagore's ever-protective compatriots.

## *Folk Theatre: Pageantry and Performance*

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**Folk Theatre of India** by Balwant Gargi, Rupa and Co., Calcutta, 1991.

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**I**ndian folk theatre provides a tremendous kaleidoscope of colours and texture: literally spanning the entire sub-continent from Kamrup to Kutch, from Kerala to Kashmir. The scene is replete with scores of forms which derive their context from the genius of the Indian people in each region and the environment that is peculiar to them.

The celebrated playwright, director and novelist, Balwant Gargi, selects nine of these forms for an in-depth treatment—Jatra, Nautanki, Bhavai, Tamasha, Ramlila, Raslila, Therukoothu, Yakshagana and Chhau: in his book *Folk Theatre of India*. He covers, besides the above, a dozen or so other forms for a summary treatment. The “practical man of the theatre” that Gargi is claimed to be, is evident in his detailed descriptions of the stage, craft, costume, make-up and presentation aspects of folk theatre, replete with gods and goddesses, heroes and demons and not forgetting quite often the male “heroine” who can be bewitching enough to teach a lesson or two to his

bemused female audience!

Almost each form comes for a comprehensive account regarding the historical evolution and genesis of names. Thus, Jatra of Bengal and Orissa and Tamasha of Maharashtra go back easily into the past couple of centuries and trace their origin from the semi-religious or political sources which, over the years, swelled with love themes, erotic stories, mythological heroes, historical romances and tales of legendary robbers, saints, social reformers and champions of truth and justice. Chhau of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa dates back to the entertainment of the troops (like Tamasha in the declining days of the Mughal empire) and derives partially their vigour and variety catering to the needs of the day. Nautanki comes in for some touching stories of the handsome Phool Singh and the beautiful princess Nautanki of Multan and their amorous, death-defying adventures. The important schools of Nautanki (*akharas*), the operatic variations (*bhagat* and *khyal*) and the lyric drama (*maanch*) are treated well, although the connections of the last two with Nautanki proper remain somewhat dubious.

Bhavai of Gujarat has an interesting origin and association with the lower castes, which derives



its sustenance and strength from the worship of the goddess Kali as an emblem of power and seems to have a known history of at least half a millenium. The arena lit with earthen lamps, the invocation of the god Ganesha, the braggings of the buffoon Joothan Mian are all covered well. The noted form Tamasha is treated *ad extenso*, including the recent legislations to ban vulgarity and to have "no objection" for the erotic *lavanis* for every performance.

Ramlila of Eastern UP is an amalgam of pageantry and performance: requiring mutiple venues, an extended number of days for enactment and the near continuous recitation by the Brahmin Ramayanis. The maharaja of Banaras coming on an elephant with folded hands completes the procession—reminding one of the king of Puri sweeping the chariots in the Rathayatra Festival.

Raslila of the Western UP and Manipur is basically an operatic play dealing with Krishna's life. The Bhakti cult makes for its "flavour, enjoyment, blissful state" through the offerings of music and dance. The community singings (*keertans*), plays (*lilas*) and the operas are all intertwined around Krishna, Radha and their female companions Gopis. The devotee becomes a female friend of the god and his beloved wife, and the religious fervour comes to life, blending devotion with the release for repressed emotions and tensions.

Therukoothu of Tamilnadu and Yakshagana of Karnataka both show strong links between the

classical and the folk theatre. Therukoothu, for instance, has gilded crowns and heavy make-up with a family resemblance to Kathakali, but without the latter's classical base and artistic splendour. Uncontrolled emotions are given vent through such episodes as the pulling out of Keechaka's entrails by Bhima and the tearing of the demon king Hiranyakashipu's entrails by the Vishnu incarnation, Narasimha. Yakshagana has themes from the epics, choosing particularly battle-scenes, marriage ceremonies and diplomatic missions. The characters speak mostly in a stylised fashion (punctuated with mono-syllabic interjections) and use the most opulent and complicated headgear. Ravana's sister Surpanakha, with her awesome appearance, remains an all-time favourite.

Chhau of South Bihar, with its rituals and beautiful masks, is the last form to be treated comprehensively. The *parikhanda* form of martial arts are inter-mingled with the lyrical movements of the boatswain, fishermen and the beasts and birds, apart from the trees and seasons. A beauteous damsel like Chandrabhaga or a graceful swan come for some poetic treatment by the dancers. But the main point here is that Chhau is primarily a dance form, taking short narratives and has very clear grammar and idiom, thus almost qualifying to be a classical dance. How it can be treated as a folk theatre remains an enigma. Confusion is worse confounded when the author takes up the Chhau

of Orissa (especially Mayurbhanj, while Keonjhar is totally omitted) only for a perfunctory mention, although it is extremely popular today. The worst is the total omission of the Chhau of West Bengal (especially Purulia) with its vigorous masked form and epic stories, which have made several rounds of the world.

The weak part of the book is the general datedness of its material (most of it seems to have been collected a few decades ago), thus diluting the quality of the work. Jatra, for instance, has nowhere the kind of economics the author mentions and the personalities and characters enshrined by him in the book disappeared at least 25 years ago. Another weak point is its lack of emphasis on the essential feature of inter-relatedness of the Indian folk forms, be it dance or drama, music or painting. The contributions of the scholar-aesthete Kapila Vatsyayan are worth remembering in this context, to establish the colourful cross-disciplinary view of the Indian panorama, as against a linear view of Gargi whose descriptions remain very straightforward and totally black-and-white.

In a separate study of the folk performing arts of India, this reviewer found some fascinating facts. They are:

(a) *Dynamism*: The cultural equilibrium is not static in nature, but continued over time since

possibilities of multiple meanings and multiple moments can be tackled. For instance, a Bhavai troop of 500 can easily take on mythological, family planning and indebtedness themes—as though taking on new layers of time;

(b) *Totality*: Mythology as well as actuality are built in all formats, as is evident in the Jatra which can take on puranic, historical, political or social themes and carry out presentations with the same group of artistes;

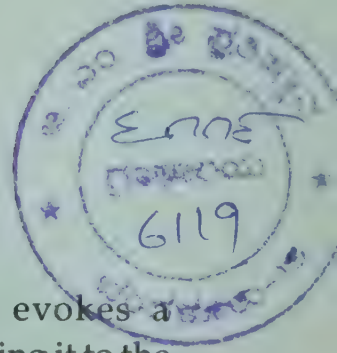
(c) *Resilience*: Contemporaneity and immediacy can be imported in a trice. For instance, Punjabi, Harianvi and Himachali folk music and dances can incorporate themes relevant to the China and Pakistan conflicts with such lyrics as “O Plant, bend a little so that my fighter-hero (earlier version: lover) can cross over you”; and

(d) *Vitality*: As social and psychic identifications are both intensive and extensive in these art forms, a performance of Tamasha can take the countryside village, the newly grown township or the sophisticated metropolis in its stride and literally by storm.

One wishes Gargi had made some effort to draw out the common points and characteristics of the Indian folk theatre which he enumerates. The reader would have expected these from a scholar like Gargi and would be pardoned to have been sorely disappointed!



SHANTA CHOPRA

*Awakening in the First Light*

*First Light* by Leena Dhingra,  
Rupa & Co., Calcutta, 1991.

**F**irst Light or (Amrit Vela)—the time of nectar, the time just before dawn when the sun has risen but cannot as yet be seen. This is the time between day and night, the space between the earth and sky, the half way point between East and West.

In India, the day always seems to start early. Ritual baths, morning prayers and visits to the temples are usually made before the chores of the day start. People who are not familiar with Indian ways find this pre-occupation with dawn rather unusual. However, while starting off on this very Indian note Leena Dhingra's writing becomes progressively western as the story unfolds. Though born in India of Indian parents she has a very European outlook on life. Situations which an Indian would accept without question, seem very strange to her. Her experience at the post office, though a little exaggerated, could happen to anyone. We have started accepting inefficiency as the norm rather than as an aberration.

Her visit to the Cottage

Industries Emporium evokes a similar reaction. Comparing it to the big departmental stores she finds the system very confusing. People do not always follow the rules and the ones who do are justifiably irritated. The street sellers, on the other hand are very eager to sell their wares. They will even go to the extent of borrowing goods from other shops to oblige a customer. While an Indian would accept this as something quite normal, to a foreigner this aspect of Indian salesmanship would seem rather overdone, like the proverbial Indian hospitality.

Forty four years after Independence, inefficiency, corruption and conspicuous spending amidst appalling poverty are very obvious, but one must not look at the negative side of things only. There have also been positive gains in our developmental and industrialisation programmes. India is not only a country of gurus, devis, mandirs and masjids but has become an industrialised nation in a context that is very different to the west. While the survivals of our past may appear more unusual than those of the west (of which we are getting considerable evidence from Ireland with its Catholic-Protestant communal strife or from the Yugoslav civil war) they seem to serve the function of giving

the European mind what it wants to see rather than being a part of the natural sequences of the book. This is a literary weakness from which a number of authors writing on India in English seem to suffer from.

While the narrative suffers from a westernised overlay, Leena Dhingra's characters are very striking and true to life. Meera is a good characterisation of an Indian who has been mainly exposed to the West. To find her identity she comes to India, and after a struggle with the contradictions within her, casts her lot in with the west. Bibiji, the great aunt on the other hand, knows what the drawbacks are: People talk only of the "Export business, the politicians, nepotism". But she is sure of her ideals and beliefs and says, "India is all the things you feel it to be, and much else as well. There are changes and upheavals and transformations in every sphere of life and continuity too". She also adds that although women's conditions have changed tremendously, there are many more outlets for them and a lot more needs to be done. It is up to all of us to work hard in order to achieve our goals in life.

Another character that comes

to life towards the end of the book is Meera's aunt Daya. She is a self effacing woman, always helping others and keeps herself in the background.

Before Meera left for England she wanted "to take back a story with her to London—a meaningful story". Aunt Daya, "almost with defiance", said that she would relate a story told to her by Ma Anandmayee. It is the tale of a clay pot being modelled by a potter. How it was pummelled and beaten, scorched in the sun and burnt in a kiln till it attained its shape. After that it was handled and tested by people, till someone brought it home, filled it with holy water from the Ganga, and placed it on the altar with flowers and incense for puja. The pot was just clay, till it went through all the suffering to get its identity and then it found peace. The story has a meaning for everyone. Until you know your own identity and goal in life you cannot find peace and happiness. After hearing this story Meera realises where her 'Amrit Vela' or dawn lies. It can be in the East as well as the West. She chooses the West.



DAVID TURNER is Professor of Anthropology and Fellow of Trinity College, University of Toronto. In addition he is Fellow of Netherlands Institute of Advanced Studies and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. His recent books are *Life Before Genesis: An Understanding of the Significance of Australian Aboriginal Culture* and *Return to Eden: A Journey through the Promised Landscape of Amagalyuagba* (both published by Peter Lang, New York/Bern). His interests extend to comparative religion, marginalised peoples and peace and conflict studies.

CHIDANANDA DASGUPTA has had a long association with films. He co-founded the Calcutta Film Society and Federation of Film Societies of India with Satyajit Ray. He has been a member of the International Federation of Film Critics, Munich since 1985 and received the President's Award for the Best Film Critic in 1988. An active participant of many international film festivals, he is presently Arts Editor with the *Telegraph* in Calcutta.

PAUL DOLE is a senior Vice-President with Systems Applications and a Trustee of the Universal Serial Book Exchange, the largest scholarly books and periodicals organisation in the world, supplying most of the important scholarly libraries. He is co-author, with Gerard Tavernier, of *Career in Management* (Cornmarket Press, London) as well as *Brazil and the World* with Mihajlo Mesarovic and Paulo Mauro. At present he is working on a project assessing a comprehensive approach to greenhouse gas emissions reduction.

AKHTAR QAMBER has taught English Literature both at home and abroad, her last two assignments being at Miranda House, Delhi and International Christian University, Tokyo. Her major publications are *Yeats and the Noh*, *Sabbatical in Japan* and *Why not to Ustad Zauq?* (poems in English) and *The Last Mushairah of Delhi*. Much of her recent work on Sufism been published in journals like *Islamic Culture*, *Islam and the Modern Age*, and the *IIC Quarterly*.

NOEL O'SULLIVAN's academic work has been mainly in twentieth century European, American and British political philosophy. He is presently looking at Indian politics and philosophy from the comparative angle. His publications include *Conservatism*, *Fascism*, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, and *The Structure of Modern Ideology*. He completed his Ph.D. from London University in 1969 and is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Developing Societies in Delhi.

RAVINDER KUMAR is a social historian with a scholarly interest in modern and contemporary India. He is currently Director of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. Prior to this, he was Professor of History at the University of Allahabad and at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. His published works include: *Western India in the Nineteenth Century* (1968); (ed) *Essays*

in *Gandhian Politics* (1971); *Essays in the Social History of Modern India* (1983); (ed) *Philosophical Theory and Social Reality* (1984); *The Making of a Nation: Essays in Indian History and Politics* (1989). He has also published essays in scholarly journals in India and overseas.

P.C. CHATTERJI retired as Director General, All India Radio. His publications include *Philosophical Analysis*, *Fundamental Questions in Aesthetics*, *Values for Secular India*, and *Broadcasting in India*.

D.P. PATTANAYAK, former Director of the Central Institute of Indian Languages is a former Jawaharlal Nehru Fellow. He has been awarded Padmashree. He has about 10 books and hundred articles published in national and international journals. He is currently Secretary of the Indian Institute of Applied Language Sciences, Mysore.

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA, the exiled religious and political leader of Tibet was awarded the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize. Enthroned as the 14th Dalai Lama, he fled to India in 1959 after an abortive Tibetan uprising and set up his government in exile at Dharamsala in 1960. In 1987 he was given the Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Award. His books include *My Land and People*, *The Opening of the Wisdom Eye*, *The Buddhism of Tibet and the Key to the Middle Way*, *Kindness, Clarity and Insight*, and *A Human Approach to World Peace*. Gardening and mechanics are his other interests.

RAJIV MEHROTRA is a film-maker and Secretary of The Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness The Dalai Lama. Educated at St. Stephen's, Oxford and Columbia Universities, he works widely on both sides of the camera. He is currently working on a film on Angkor Wat and a series for television on the life of Sri Ramakrishna. He won the National Award, 1991 for his film on Baba Amte.

SHARAT KUMAR graduated from the National Defence Academy, Khadakvasla in 1956 and was commissioned in the Indian Navy. He resigned from the Indian Navy in 1966 and joined industry. Sharat Kumar has published three collections of short stories and a novel. He is also a keen photographer and has held several one-man exhibitions in Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi. In 1989 he gave up his job as the Managing Director of a large engineering company in Calcutta to devote himself fully to writing and photography. He now lives in Delhi.

MOSTAFA EL-ABBADI is Professor of Classical Studies at the Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University. His main field of research is Greek Papyri and Graeco-Roman history and civilisation. His publications include *Egypt from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest* and *The Life and Fate of the Ancient Library of Alexandria*.

PETER SCHWEIZER obtained his Doctorate in Law from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. He started his professional career as Secretary to the Tribunal for Tenancy Disputes, Zurich in 1967. It was in 1970 that he entered the Swiss diplomatic services. After having served in various capacities including Counsellor and Deputy Chief of the Embassy of Switzerland in India, he was nominated



Ambassador to Ethiopia and Djibouti in August 1991. His publications include *Contempt of Court—The Protection of the Administration of Law*.

ERIC GONSALVES joined the Foreign Service in 1950 after his Honours in Science. He has served in various capacities including Counsellor, London, Ambassador to Japan, and Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs. He has been both leader and member of Indian delegations to the UN General Assembly, Commonwealth Summits, Non-aligned Movement meetings and ASEAN and bilateral conferences. He has just completed a five-year term as Director, India International Centre.

ARVINDGUPTA has lived in Moscow from 1981–84. As a student of Soviet affairs and with his knowledge of Russian he did his M. Phil. on *glasnost* and its political dimensions. His thesis is on exploring the links between Ideology and the Soviet Foreign Policy. He has published articles and papers on changes in the USSR.

SURJIT MANSINGH is currently a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Contemporary Studies, Teen Murti House, working on India and China in Asia. She has been a University Professor in India and United States and is the author of *Diplomatic History of Modern India, India's Search for Power* and numerous papers in academic journals.

SUNEET CHOPRA, writes on art, sociology and history. He has read African studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. He has written a book called *Transactions and Other Stories* and contributed articles in *Muslims in India*, ed. Zafar Imam; and *Chains of Servitude* ed. Utsa Patnaik and Manjari Dingwaney. He is a social activist in the student, youth and agricultural workers movement. He has helped to found *Social Scientist*, a journal.

KATHLEEN RAINE, scholar and poet, has for many years been known as the leading exponent of what she herself calls "the learning of the imagination" in the work of Blake, Yeats and other poets of the Platonic Tradition. She has eleven volumes of poetry to her credit. The concluding volume of her autobiography *India Seen Afar* is the culmination of her studies and her personal views.

UTPAL K. BANERJEE has specialised in information technology and management areas, apart from taking a keen interest in performing arts. He has been Director General of All India Management Association and National Projects Director of Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. He is currently Chairman of a computer training and educational organisation in Delhi. He has published nine books on information management and two on performing arts.

SHANTA CHOPRA is an Economics graduate from Kinnaird College, Lahore. She has represented the Indian Railways in the Family Planning Association of India. Besides writing for the Railway Women's Organisation she has had a couple of book reviews published in *Link* and *Financial Express*. Writing and painting have always been her interests.

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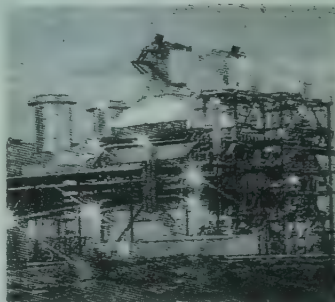
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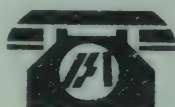
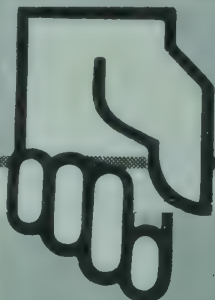
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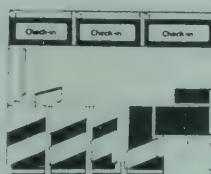
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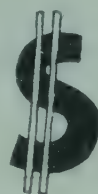
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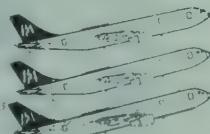
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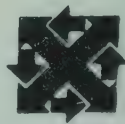
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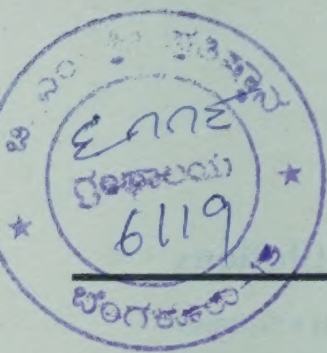
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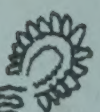
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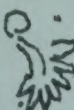
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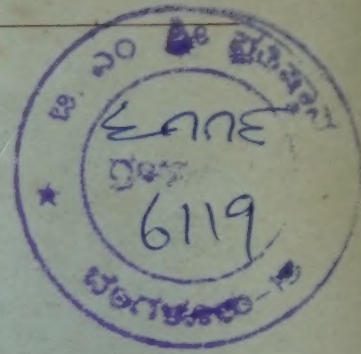
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